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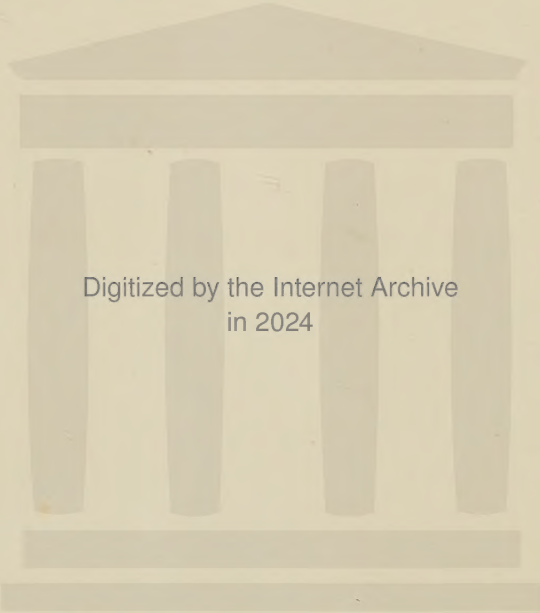
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MRS. CECIL CHESTERTON

In Darkest London

by

MRS. CECIL CHESTERTON

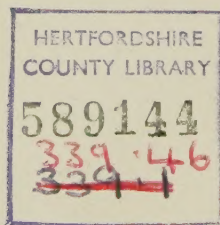


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FOREWORD

It is continually being said—with that fatal facility which obscures the truth beyond all hope of recognition—that for a woman who is willing to work, employment can always be found. Dislike of effort—bone laziness it is called—a vagabond love of a shiftless life, an ingrained determination to live on other people's generosity; these are some of the reasons advanced for destitution.

I have never believed in these glib assertions. I have always known that things were very different, and I determined to put my belief to the test. I decided to see what would happen if I started from zero with nothing but my personality to stand on. In the course of my travels I met with many adventures and amazing kindness; but over and above all this, I proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that for a woman to get employment, in any recognised calling, without reference or status of some sort, is tragically impossible.

How then does the outcast live?

I have answered the question, in some degree at least, in these pages.

THE AUTHOR.

IN DARKEST LONDON

CHAPTER I

“ I WALKED WITH OTHER SOULS IN PAIN. . . ”

LONDON is a city of sudden and violent contrasts. You can step from comfort and security of existence into destitution within a few minutes. This sounds incredible ; but it can be done as I have proved. I wanted to find out how the woman without a home, without a reference, without money, friends or a decent wardrobe, supports life. Well, I did find out, and what I have learned has impressed itself upon my mind with a rigidity that time itself cannot reduce. . . .

I left my home one evening in February. I wore my own clothes, which were shabby, but not ragged. I had watertight shoes and a raincoat—and not one penny in my pocket. I had determined to start life from an entirely new angle. I would arrive in London with nothing but my personality between me and starvation. To do this I went to Euston, and mingled with the crowd of passengers on the 9.20 arriving from Liverpool.

It was an odd sensation to be derelict in a crowd without one familiar association. Everybody seemed to have a friend to meet, and I pictured the sort of homes that they were going to. I had never troubled about this before when I arrived at a terminus, I was always too engrossed with my own personal affairs. But when the crowd cleared off and I found myself left solitary on the platform, the first stirring of that loneliness I was later on to fathom to the full, made itself felt in me. It was one of the bitterest nights of a very cold winter, and the wind cut the skin like the lash of a whip. I pulled myself together and went right up to a policeman.

I have always admired the London police, but I never realised before that they were so tall. I was very conscious of my destitute condition, and I looked up at him wistfully, and a little afraid.

"I haven't any money," I said, "and I want a bed for the night. Can you tell me where to go?"

He looked down at me, mildly interested, taking in the brown paper parcel that I carried containing a nightdress, brush and comb and other toilet necessities.

"Have you lost your money, then?"

I nodded. "I left my bag in the waiting room at Liverpool Station. I have come to London to get work."

“ Well, that’s a very silly thing, you know,” said he. “ There isn’t any work in London. What can you do ? ”

I explained that I could cook, and the policeman’s face changed miraculously.

“ Oh, a cook,” he said, “ that’s a very different thing. You won’t find much trouble in getting work if that’s the case.”

I thanked him for the admission, and once again asked where I could obtain a lodging for the night.

“ There’s a Salvation Army Hostel off the Tottenham Court Road,” said he. “ You couldn’t do better than go there.”

Now between asking what to do and doing it, there is a wide gulf fixed. I had an awful tussle with myself before I plucked up courage to knock at the Hostel door. But I wasn’t going to be beaten before I had begun the fight, and having walked up and down the street a few times I put my faith to the test.

The portress told me that there was no accommodation for itinerant wayfarers—the Hostel was reserved for women in regular situations, who could pay a reasonable sum.

“ But I’ve nowhere to go,” I pleaded. “ Isn’t there any place where I can put up ? ”

“ There’s a Salvation Army Shelter in Mare Street, Hackney, where they’ll give

you free bed and breakfast. It's a long way, though," she added, "and I can't be sure they'll take you in, because they may not have a bed."

It was rather a miserable prospect. Mare Street, Hackney, is a hideous distance from Tottenham Court Road, especially if you walk all the way, and the cold was growing every moment more intense. Just for a second I was tempted to go home. Never had the prospect of a comfortable bed held such allurements. But I stiffened my will and went on. I had vowed to take adventure where it found me, in my struggle to earn a living, and there was nothing for it but to walk.

It was my first experience of destitution, and it sank deep into my consciousness. It is one thing to walk through London with the knowledge of a comfortable fireside awaiting you—it is another to drag the weary length of interminable streets not knowing what lies at the end of the journey. Along the Euston Road, up Pentonville Hill, on to the "Angel," that was the first lap, and I enjoyed it. It was when I began the ghastly stretch of the Essex Road that I grew unhappy. It is a road that, to this day, I think has no ending. To me it goes on and on into infinity. In the cold moonlight of that bitter night, the houses stood out gaunt and hungry, the few wayfarers I

passed, huddled themselves against the cold, hurrying along to shelter.

By this time it was past midnight. I had not had a meal for some hours, and I was growing more and more infuriated with a system of society that makes a woman walk for miles to get a bed.

I suddenly stopped dead. I was new to the form of endurance necessary to walk on a hopeless quest for hours, and felt I could not carry on. Once more I went up to the nearest policeman, standing like a tower in the empty street, and asked if I were right for Hackney.

"It's a long way yet," said he. "You'd better take a twopenny tram, there'll be one along directly."

"I've no money," I said bitterly, "and I want to get to the Salvation Army Shelter; they may give me a bed."

He looked me up and down, and then he put his big hand into his pocket. "Here you are," said he, and gave me twopence. "Look sharp now, there's a tram coming along."

One gets into the habit of using words almost as if they were dead things, and then suddenly they quicken into life. Gratitude is a word of easy coinage, it rises so glibly to the lips. I had never acutely felt that thing for which it stands, before. But when the policeman gave me twopence I understood

18 RECOGNITION OF HUMANITY

and I wanted at that moment to do something to show what I felt. It was not only that the money saved me a heartbreaking tramp in the bitter wind, it was the recognition of humanity which means so much to the outcast. I might have been lying to him in the letter, as I was in the spirit, but I was still a woman, very tired and forlorn. His gift without question or suspicion reconciled me to my fellow man.

Now Mare Street is at the end of the world and the tram rolled on and on and on, it seemed to me, to the next century. I had lived many lives when I came to my terminus, and found myself in a broad thoroughfare with high old-fashioned houses and important looking shops. But though I was in Mare Street I was by no means at the end of my quest; and here I would like to state a very real grievance from which the outcast suffers. The Salvation Army Shelter was No. 259. That sounds easy, but it isn't. None of the shops or houses have any number that is visible, the only exception to this dismal rule being the tobacconists. I counted up the number from one particular lighthouse and finally found myself outside a big barrack-like building in a gaunt garden with a gravel path. The gate clanged behind me, and I went up a long flight of stone steps and gazed at the windows, staring from the three floors above.

They were all dead, in the sense that only windows can be—not a spark of life showed through the panes. The place was terribly still, and when, summoning courage, I pulled the bell, its tingling echoes frightened me. What was I to do if they would not let me in? Had I the will, let alone the strength, to walk about until the morning?

A light gleamed out of a window and a pleasant voice with a North Country burr asked what I wanted.

“A bed,” said I.

“Have you been here before?” said the voice.

“Never,” I protested, eagerly.

“Wait a minute, and I’ll come down and let you in.”

It seemed a long time before the door was opened and a rosy-cheeked little lieutenant bade me enter. She carried a candle and its dim light showed a wide, bare hall in which were hanging spectral coats and hats. She told me to hang mine beside them.

“Have you anything of value, dear?” she said.

I shook my head. “I haven’t any money,” I answered. “I’ve come to London to get work.”

“Well, well,” she said. “We’ll see about that in the morning. Tell me your name and I’ll take you to bed.”

Annie Turner was the name I had assumed

for my wanderings, and the lieutenant noted it with a smile. Now I had expected to be severely questioned. I had anticipated being faced with innumerable forms, interrogating me as to my family history, where I was born, how educated, what disease my parents had died from, and other intimate details. There was nothing like that at all. I was asked no questions as to character or past employment. I might have been a thief, or a drunkard—it didn't matter. I was homeless, destitute. That was enough. I appeared, a stranger out of the night, and the Salvation Army took me in.

I don't think anything has ever surprised me more than this. I had not dreamed that such a thing could happen. The homeless woman has so much insult and contumely to bear ; all the pomps and panoplies of existence are against her. But this one thing remains. The outcast can find shelter and kindness in Mare Street, Hackney, and for this reason it will always be to me a blessed place.

My guide led the way along dark passages, over a courtyard paved with cobblestones, into a huge room. In the dim light which filtered through the five tall windows I could see rows of beds against the wall and down the middle of the floor. Each held a sleeping figure. My bed was pointed out to me, and " Good night, dear. God bless you," said my guide.

She went and took the candle with her. I sat upon the edge of my bed, and all at once I felt spiritually isolated, utterly cut off. There is something terrible in being with a number of strange people who are asleep. Waking, I could have found community with any of them. But sleeping, they suggested dark and almost sinister things. The room was full of the sound of breathing, the breathing of strange sleeping bodies. Awake I could have felt myself one with them, but asleep these unknown souls and tired limbs cowed me. I was slowly, but surely, surrounded by terror—an almost ungovernable impulse urged me to flight. The five tall windows were pitiless—I fell into the depths of unknown misery. I had set sail on an uncharted sea, and the waters lapped cold and deathly on my spirit.

And then the terror that walks in darkness was shattered by a cry. From the far corner of the room someone screamed for help and immediately the sleeping figures stirred and the room was full of life.

“It’s Millie,” said a tired voice, “she’s mental, you know. It’s all right, Millie, go to sleep.”

Mental! The explanation was not entirely comforting. I had a vision of Millie approaching near my bed and strangling me with horrid cries. But the explanation still continued.

"She's often like that, you know. Mental people always are."

"Mental, I don't think," said someone. "It's a nice way of putting it. The poor thing lost her husband and five sons in the war."

"Oh, yes," said the first speaker, "but she gets a lot of money for it. Millie has a fine pension."

It was an unaccustomed point of view, but its utter lack of sentiment attracted me, and I was still puzzling over the respective attractions of a fine pension and a family when the girl in the bed next to mine sat up. By this time I had slipped off my things and was in between the sheets. The bed was quite comfortable and the clothing clean and warm. It wasn't a pauper bed by any means.

"You were in very late," said my neighbour. "What's wrong with you?"

"I just wanted a lodging," I answered.

"Are you going to have a baby, dear?" she queried. "Most of us are, here."

I reassured her on the point, and she told me, very simply, that she expected her child to be born in three months. She explained that the Shelter was a kind of clearing house for the Salvation Army. All sorts and conditions of women in every kind of trouble went there and were sorted out, some to maternity homes, others to situations,

and others again to the Colonies. I shall have more to say as to the working of this particular centre later on.

I found plenty to think about from what I had already been told. I did not get any sleep that night, but watched the grey dawn lighten the window panes until, at half-past five, signs of life began to appear ; the officers in charge, captain and lieutenant, got up and dressed. The gas was turned on and I could see the room quite plainly. At the far end was a row of basins and jugs and by the side of each bed a carpet mat. That was all the furniture. There were no chairs and every woman laid her clothes across the end of the bed—except those who slept in them. We were allowed to rest until half-past six when a bell rang and we all turned out. We stripped our beds and were sent to fetch water to wash with. I took a tin jug and went across the courtyard. It was the coldest morning I ever remember—and by the time I reached the tap my hands were almost numb. I suffered acutely at the thought of the cold water which would presently emerge. But a miracle happened and a warm, kindly stream gushed forth. It is a very childish thing to admit, but when I found it was hot water I had to wash in I could have cried. At that moment I could have believed in the existence of God—which for an agnostic is something of an admission !

There was no looking glass in the sleeping room, but we did our hair by sense of touch and, having shaken our mats and made our beds, trooped into a large room known as the day or working room and waited for breakfast.

It is a cheerless place, that room. The walls of sea green are utterly hopeless, erupting every little space into a photograph of some Salvation Army celebrity, all very stiff and precise and bristling with efficiency. The floor is covered with a sad oilcloth, but the long French windows look out on a fair-sized garden, which even on that dark February morning showed signs of spring with star-like auriculas and fugitive anemones.

We did not speak much before breakfast, but sat round the fire, or as near to it as we could get. One girl I noticed particularly. She was a hunchback, with the spiritual eyes and refined face of the type. She seemed oblivious to the rest of us and read intently, without looking up.

At half-past seven we went down to breakfast, and here again I was astonished. I anticipated a long service, but the meal was merely heralded by a short grace, and then we all sat down at two long tables, spread with clean cloths, nice crockery and spoons and forks. There was porridge, well made, with milk and sugar, plenty of hot tea, good bread and quite bearable margarine.

There is a great deal in that word "bearable." Butter is beyond the dreams of the outcast, and the number and variety of horrors known as "marg," are undreamt of by the comfortably placed.

It was a very human meal, with plenty of cheery talk. The majority of the women were quite young—domestic servants, for the most part—and very cheerful. The level of good looks was a high one, and I noticed an entire absence of powder or paint. The girls were bobbed or shingled, wore pretty frocks, many of them sleeveless, smart shoes, and almost invariably silk stockings. That is one of the discoveries I made in my wanderings. The outcast, until she gives up hope, tries at all costs after silk hosiery; indeed, apart from match sellers, I was the only destitute woman who wore wool.

The meal was concluded by a short address and a hymn, and we all trooped out to the day room again and began to discuss our prospects. It was a very wonderful experience to hear these girls talk of their future. They all had a complete philosophy of life. Nobody criticised, nobody asked a question, except in friendliness, everyone was sympathetic. I was interested in a very attractive little creature with a club foot. She wore her blue gown with an air, and her dark hair was as fine as silk.

"I shall be having my baby in two months,"

said she. "It's my second child, you know. He's a boy, so I want the one that's coming to be a girl. I'd rather have stayed on in my place another month, but my lady thought I'd better not. She wrote up to the Army and I'm going to a Home this afternoon. She's been very good to me."

She smiled very sweetly at a dark Jewess with blazing eyes and a tragic face. I have never seen a mouth so miserably pathetic. She answered in a hot, fierce voice.

"You'll want all the goodness you can get, my girl, and so shall I. This one will be my first, and I'll take care there's not another. Gawd!" she clenched her thin hands in denunciation. "Men are rotters, aren't they? It's a bleeding shame we should have to pay for their pleasure!"

All the bitterness of woman from the first beginnings was in that voice, all the passionate revolt against the fate which makes the woman pay. It was a dramatic moment. Instinctively I caught my breath. It was the Madonna of the club foot who answered her.

"Ah, yes!" she said, with a wonderful smile, "they may have the pleasure, but we have the babies. When I knew mine was coming, I felt a bit like you; I couldn't know how I should want it; and then it came, and something grew in me as if my heart would burst, and I don't care what happens, so as he's mine!"

"But how do you keep him—and you with another coming?"

It was a nice point, and I was very anxious to see how the triumphant mother would solve it; but, as I was to discover, the young women at the Salvation Army Shelter are for the most part realists. They look facts straight between the eyes.

"The father pays, of course. He tried to wriggle out of the responsibility, because, like a fool, I burnt his letters, I was so mad when I knew he wouldn't marry me. But my sister, she gave evidence and I get the money regular. There won't be any trouble with the second child's father; he's a good sort. What about you? Is he married?"

"No," said the tragic one.

"Well then, why don't you get spliced up?"

The Jewess had a catch in her throat.

"He's a chauffeur," she said, "and particular like, he's educated, and I'm in service. But he's coming to see me to-day, and his mother's going to take the baby."

"Don't you believe it, dear," said the Madonna, "if a man won't marry you, his mother isn't likely to take your kid."

I hoped that the discussion would go further. It was a revelation to me to hear these young unmarried mothers handle the vital things of life with such clear-sighted honesty. It was as though I had come to a

new and undiscovered country. We are all of us so fond, in literary circles, of discussing whether the modern woman has any use for love ; we are most of us agreed that she has very little for sex ! In Mare Street, Hackney, they would stare astonished at such arguments. They know exactly what they risk and why they risk it. And they do not grumble when they get hurt. They do not rebel against their fate, nor very much against the men who get them into trouble. They have the babies—that is enough, and, secure in achievement, they go on with their life.

Apart from her tragedy, the little Jewess was quite helpful. She asked me what I was going to do, and I explained I wanted a situation as a cook, but that I had no reference.

“ That’s a pity,” she said. “ It will make it more difficult for you to live in. I don’t hold with girls doing daily work ; by the time you’ve paid for your room and had a bit of fun it doesn’t leave enough for food. If you live in you get your nourishment. There’s a lot said against service nowadays, but there’s a lot to be said for it. What I say is, get as much pay, as much food, and as much time off as you can, and then put your back into it.”

There was an amazing atmosphere of friendliness all round. I say amazing, for among

professional women there is not a general tendency to extend the helping hand. Here I found no sniffs, no impertinence, no curiosity. On those young, serious and sweet faces there was nothing but genuine interest in their fellows' plight and very few of them complained of their own.

One by one, the new-comers of the previous day were summoned to the adjutant to give particulars of their case. Some had arrived with letters from their employers, and were waiting, pending their despatch to a home. Three admissions had been made on what is called the "Night Bell." Two of these were young girls ; I was the third. We naturally clung together and one of my companions, a very pretty creature about twenty, was more than sympathetic.

"Did you say you hadn't got a reference, dear ? " she asked.

Turning rather red—the repetition of the question was embarrassing—I admitted that this was so.

"Well, you know," she said, "I want a place as housemaid. I had to leave my room, because I owed the rent, but I can get my box when I've a bit of money and meanwhile I've got a written reference, here it is." She handed me a letter, setting forth her special qualifications and her general character for honesty and efficiency.

"You see, dear," she said, "it wouldn't be

very difficult to put in your name along with mine, and then we might get a job together. Hackney wouldn't be any use, and you're not smart enough for the West End, but we ought to get something round about Islington, what do you say ? ”

I could only thank her, which I did with increasing humility. There was I, a complete stranger to this young thing, and yet, because she felt I was down and out, she was ready to risk committing an offence against the law. The law—I could imagine what the Madonna of the club foot would have said :—

“ Why, what difference does that make ? ”

Most of the girls were quite communicative. The majority, as I have said, were domestic servants. The older women had different histories. There was Millie, the mental case, who lived permanently in Mare Street, while some half-a-dozen others of similar age were waiting to be moved on.

The little hunchback did not talk very much ; she was still reading. But I gathered from the others that she was staying at the Shelter till she could get work. She had no people and had never had a baby. That was why, perhaps, she immersed herself so deeply in her book. I determined to see what she was reading, but just at that moment I was summoned to the adjutant.

Up to the present I had encountered no officialdom and an entire absence of red tape.

Anything less like the popular idea of such an institution it would be impossible to imagine. Places there are, blasphemous with the title of Home for Fallen Women, where the unmarried mother is preached at all day, and crucified at night on a hard mattress and a harder pillow. At Mare Street one moves in an atmosphere of spiritual freedom; the Salvation Army is not there to save your soul, but to help your body, and the degree of your morality or immorality is not taken into account. Nevertheless, I felt a little frightened when I entered the Staff Room. The adjutant, capable, and brainy, told me to sit down and, I felt, sized up my character within two minutes. I told her that I had lost my bag in Liverpool and had arrived penniless in London. I told her also—I was beginning to believe it myself—that I had left my references in the stolen bag. My last situation had been in Liverpool.

“There must be somebody who will speak for you,” she said.

“There isn’t,” I answered. “The people at my last place went to America.”

“I should say you’d been out of a situation for over a year?” she suggested.

I agreed, and knew she was expecting a confession, which, however, I did not make.

“Well, there’s something wrong with you,” she said, “and I don’t know what it is. You don’t drink,” she added conclusively, and I

felt grateful. The strange thing was that as I sat in that chair, the personality of Annie Turner, the out-of-work, stole over me. I found myself listening in silence to statements which, in my own person, I would have hotly contested. I even began to be a little frightened that the adjutant might keep me in the home.

"There's very little chance that you'll get a place as cook," she said, "without a reference. A cook's work is important, and people won't have a woman in their house without knowing all about her. In any case, you wouldn't get a job in Hackney; they are nearly all Jews here and they cook for themselves. Still, you can go to the Labour Exchange and try your luck. Come back and tell me how you get on, if you like."

I felt sure the adjutant thought I must have been in prison, yet she treated me very nicely and wished me luck. My prospects were not bright, but nevertheless I was relieved to go. Institutional life, even at its very best, weighs heavily upon me. I went back to the day room to get my brown paper parcel. The little rosy-cheeked lieutenant, who had admitted me the previous night, was cutting out overalls and Mental Millie was measuring the stuff. The Madonna of the club foot had gone upstairs to her two year old baby and none of my other friends could be seen. Only the hunchback girl was

there, still reading by the window. I crossed the room with its sad green walls and hopeless oilcloth and took a last look at the anemones. Then glancing over her shoulder I said good-bye. It gave me a queer sensation when the title of her book stared up at me. She was immersed in George Gissing's "The Odd Women."

CHAPTER II

THE FIGHT TO WORK

THE steps of Number 259, Mare Street, Hackney, are worn down with the countless feet that have trod them in search of succour. None have been turned empty away. It is the end of a pilgrimage of infinite pain, where the weary and heavy-laden can find respite from their suffering.

In the course of last year the receiving station dealt with 1,298 cases. It was one of the first of the Salvation Army centres, and the house, many years old, has none of the rigidity of an institution. It is large, rambling, unexpected, like the families of the last century, and it preserves the atmosphere and tradition of a Home.*

*LONDON RECEIVING HOME

(259, Mare Street, Hackney).

The women come for various reasons ; a large number of them are either homeless or destitute, some have become estranged from their friends or relatives. Often quite young women and girls, who have become stranded in London, apply to the Home, or are brought by the Police. Those needing a longer period of help are transferred to other Salvation Army Homes. The Home is open day and night for women and girls who are in need of shelter and assistance.

Accommodation.—Women, 47 ; Children, 6.

I went again to Number 259, and those parts which were closed to me the night I was given shelter I visited, and saw for myself how the inmates live. The work is divided between urgently necessitous cases and those for which time and consideration is required. From all over London, and indeed England, women and girls arrive. If a domestic servant stays out later than she has permission to do, she can always find admission in Mare Street, Hackney. If a girl comes up from the country hoping to get a situation and is disappointed, the police send her to the receiving centre. Each case is kept for a night and then referred to the Army Headquarters on the other side of the road. The Headquarters institute inquiries. I do not mean that they persecute the unfortunate applicant with merciless interrogations. Poverty is no deterrent, and even if the out-of-work has no reference, the deficiency can

Women passed out.—For one year, ended March 31st, 1925 :—

Sent to Situations	435
Restored to Friends.. .. .	427
Otherwise Assisted	275
Unsatisfactory	19
Transferred to other Salvation Army Homes ..	142

Total	1298
---------------	------

Children Assisted and passed out	212
Children Transferred to other Salvation Army Homes	5

Total	217
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(These are children who come with their mothers.)

36 THE SPIRIT OF THE PLACE

be dealt with. In the latter case, the girl is offered a sojourn in a training centre, from whence she is found a situation. If, on the other hand, a reference be forthcoming she stays at the shelter until a place is found for her, and from that time on regards Mare Street as her home. Any girl who has once stayed there is free to come for her holidays, or to spend her evenings off, she will meet girls of her own age, and as a rule regards the matron or the adjutant as friend and adviser.

There are forty-five beds in the house. Of these a fair proportion are filled by temporary visitors. Many cases of attempted suicide are brought to Mare Street, when young mothers, maddened by poverty and suffering, have tried to take their own lives and their children's. These women are nursed back to health for weeks or months, as the case may be, and from the Shelter return once more to the big world. Unmarried mothers, as I have said, come in considerable numbers. They wait at the Shelter until Headquarters make arrangements for them at a maternity home. There are a few cases of inebriates, who do not wish to go into an Institution. These remain at the Shelter until they regain normal health and self-control.

Perhaps I can best express the spirit which animates this place by describing a talk I had with the matron. She is a woman of

very wide experience, and I asked her what in her opinion were the chief causes of the misery and starvation of the outcast. I have heard so much of the evils of drink, so many statistics have been forced upon me proving that the outcasts have but themselves to blame for their condition, that I waited very eagerly for the answer.

“Generally speaking, it’s poverty,” she answered, “and very largely, the shortage of housing. Illness, bad luck, increase of rent, drive many a decent woman out of her home and force her to become a tramp on the road, or to sell matches in the street. Humanity is very decent—at least, I find it so; it’s only very seldom that you can say a woman is down and out by her own fault.”

The Mare Street Shelter is the only receiving station of its kind in London, and as will be seen it covers every department of destitution. Some of the women who first found their way there years ago still keep up their connection, and the club room in the garden, reserved for the use of former inmates, is always crowded on a Wednesday or Sunday night. The garden when I last went there was full of flowers, and some dozen babies were peacefully sleeping in the sun. These, with their mothers, are those temporary cases which I have already described. There are always babies in the Shelter. They look very well and are extremely happy.

Notwithstanding the admirable work of the Shelter, its accommodation for the permanently destitute is necessarily limited—but no one is refused a bed if there be one vacant, and the police, before now, have brought a woman all across London to get her a lodging for the night. The young unmarried mother is but an immediate problem—practical help and sympathy will ultimately set her on her feet with her child. Suicides, even drunkards, are only temporarily incapacitated ; but what can be done for the woman whom destitution has driven, literally, into the streets, without a home, a change of clothes, without even the means to keep herself clean ? Mare Street does its best to help, but obviously only a small proportion of the army of outcasts can be relieved there.

And of this proportion a certain percentage will not ask for help. It is a mistake to suppose that those women whom you can see any night huddled up in doorways, in back streets, cowering under the arches by the river, are not conscious of their rags and dirt. Believe me, they have no preference for dirt, but to be clean costs money, and such is their state that even if they *could* spare a few coppers necessary for a wash, no public baths or lavatories would admit them. Thus, it is but seldom that Mare Street receives a call from the utterly down and out. All women have their personal pride ; it is perhaps the

last thing that leaves us. Such as I refer to go elsewhere for a bed. If they have as much as fivepence they can get a clean, not too hard, bed at another Army Shelter in Hanbury Street, Whitechapel. This I shall describe later. I mention it now as one of the few places where match-sellers and kindred traders can get a bed without fear of inspection, or even criticism.

In relation to Mare Street Shelter, it is good to know that it is held in the memory of very many with affectionate gratitude. And, once more, I take pleasure in dealing with an argument the ignorant are continually advancing. It is often said that a girl who has "fallen"—most hideous and obscene description—once, will "fall" again, and that the majority of unmarried mothers find their way to prostitution. This is contradicted alike by figures, facts and experience. My little Madonna of the club foot, about to have her second baby, will remain the same brave, kindly and hard-working woman should she have twenty illegitimate children rather than two. According to the matron, the majority of unmarried mothers who have been through their hands are doing very well, earning enough to keep their child at a foster mother's or even, in many cases, getting enough to make a home for them both.

Something of what these girls feel is expressed in a letter I received when I was

writing an account of my experiences for a Sunday newspaper. I had many letters, but this, I think, was the most poignant and revealing.

“ I happen to know 259, Mare Street, Hackney, rather well. I am still indebted to them for a free and deliciously warm dinner, which came as a veritable gift from the gods, one cold, wet winter’s day, some two years ago, after I, like one of the women you write of, had been walking—walking—till my whole body ached.

“ Later I went to another Salvation Army Rescue Home—this time more thoughtfully called ‘ Home for Mothers and Babies.’ There I remained for seven months, hiding from a curious and unsympathetic world, the shame I had brought on myself, living with just the sort of girl you saw at Mare Street that night, and many other sorts too ; girls taken from practically every walk of life, ex-chorus, factory, office, shop and servant girls, with here and there a waitress or a farmer’s daughter ; plenty of types, plenty of different perspectives, and always plenty of courage ; that was the most wonderful part of it all, the courage which these girls, mostly the victims of an unfortunate fate, displayed in the face of overwhelming tragedy. A hopeless, blank future, with the added burden of an illegitimate child to support.

“ The tragic look of your dark-eyed Jewess recalls to my mind the look of the girls who were with me waiting to ‘ go down.’ It seemed they always wore that dull, frightened stare, and their smiles were so rueful !

“ Later they would return from the Woman’s Hospital

at Clapton, hugging tightly their precious woollen, cuddly bundle of humanity, their faces paler and manner subdued ; some were only eighteen, mostly all in their early twenties, but they had lived and seen life.

“ As week succeeded week, and the end of the six months (the ordered time to remain after baby is born) draws to a close, you would see they get perturbed. The fatal day arrives—the parting is hard, ah, how hard only God knows ! To-morrow those arms will be empty. That baby will be in a strange foster home, that mother will be breaking her heart, working feverishly, possibly taking her first place (as a general servant in a Jewish household) working like grim death to kill the ache. Oh, the horror of that first night in a strange bed, with no cot to rock, a nameless child, perhaps, but a mother’s baby for all that. To-day as she says ‘ Good-bye, girls,’ she smiles, yes, even laughs outright, shrilly, and when someone says ‘ Good luck, dear,’ the tears will trickle down her cheeks, still she smiles, waves her hand almost flip-pantly. ‘ Thanks, awfully. See you again.’ The big, brown door swings on its hinges—she is gone—gone—to face—what ?

“ I have seen several of them again quite recently, those girls who shared a tragic period with me. I think they have nearly all altered, they are happy enough and quite smart, too, some of them—not all ; marvellous how it is done on, say nine shillings weekly dress allowance and pin money, for baby and self, isn’t it ? The ones I have in my mind’s eye are *not* prostitutes, just ordinary girls living ordinary lives to the best of their ability, making and getting the very best they can out of what is left from the wreck.

“ Yes, and you mention, I notice, the ‘ Good night ’

and 'God bless you,' of that Salvation Army officer. Did that cheer you? It cheered me more than once when I lay on a tear-drenched pillow night after night; made me feel someone *did* care after all, and there must be many poor down and outs who have derived comfort from that very homely phrase."

I have been over some of the Salvation Army Maternity Homes and, though in some the conditions are more comfortable than others, they are all animated by the same spirit of uncritical helpfulness. Other maternity homes there are, excellently sanitated and most hygienic, where the unmarried mother is nailed to the cross of intolerance, and branded with what the female warders call her "shame."

I want to make it quite plain that before I started on my voyage of exploration I knew absolutely nothing of the Salvation Army centres, shelters or homes. If there be any value in this account of my experiences, it must lie in this, that I write only of what I myself have seen and felt and known.

It will be plain that one contingent of the outcast world is fairly well provided for. The unmarried mother, of whatever class, does not find it very difficult to discover a kindly hand, and, as I have said, once her difficulty is over, it is probable she will meet safe harbourage in quiet waters. The remaining sections of destitute womanhood

comprise, amongst others, itinerant street vendors, itinerant office cleaners and odd job charwomen. All these belong to a floating population, without home or habitation, living from hand to mouth, sleeping how and when and where they can.

Another section is the cheaper kind of prostitute. The girl, or young woman, who, without a roof over her head, or a room in which to prosecute her trade, has to ply her calling up blind alleys, in dark places, for a few pence. These find a bed—when they have sufficient money—in the public lodging houses at prices ranging from tenpence to one and two. Then again, you have the women on the road, who peddle matches, hairpins and other trifles, and cover a definite route, returning to London every few weeks. These women for the most part put up at casual wards or doss houses. They are a very definite type, sturdy of physique and of spirit. They have been forced to this mode of life through the tragic scarcity of housing, and the fall in the purchasing power of the shilling.

There is a deplorable lack of proper accommodation for the itinerant London outcast. Be she match-seller or prostitute, she should have the opportunity of getting a decent bed on payment of a fixed sum. Outside the Salvation Army shelters, the standard of cleanliness is variable. Among the public lodging houses, run for individual

profit, it is extremely low, and in some of these places the beds are stained, the blankets dirty, the washing accommodation of the most rudimentary kind, and this, it is somewhat disconcerting to find, in houses licensed by the London County Council and under its inspection. Certain religious bodies other than the Salvation Army also run women's lodging houses ; these I shall deal with in turn. I have stayed at nearly all of them and know their slightest variation from type.

Here I feel is the place for me to protest against the apathy which prevails with regard to the state of these public lodging houses. I have written to women M.P.'s, women County Councillors and I have urged on them the necessity for reform. I have received letters of courtesy meaning nothing ; and I ask myself for what reason women are in politics if not to fight for decent conditions for their sex ? I am not a feminist ; that is to say I hold no brief for the view that man is the cause of injustice to woman. But I contend that it is a deliberate and unjustifiable injustice that the London County Council—England's premier civic authority—should provide spacious, clean, comfortable lodging houses for men, replete with bathrooms and every modern hygienic appliance, and at the same time refuse to consider the supply of similar accommodation for women.

Why should a woman, if she can pay, be compelled to sleep in a dirty bed when for the same price a man can get a clean one? I have walked from one end of London to the other, looking for a bed, and I have been treated as though I was a criminal trying to steal. I could not have dreamed that in this day of feminine emancipation from political disabilities that trade union leaders, women preachers and doctors, barristers, lawyers and under secretaries, would all have passed by on the other side, leaving their sisters to find refuge in squalor, or to spend the night walking the inhospitable streets.

I have run the gamut of lodging house accommodation. I have slept in the same room as matchsellers, tramps and prostitutes, and the general conditions—always excepting the Salvation Army—are a standing reproach to every woman who believes in what she calls social reform or has any touch of feeling for her sex.

That I speak with knowledge will be shown in the detailed accounts herein following of the places I have visited.

CHAPTER III

THE HARD-FACED WOMAN OF CHARITY SQUARE

I WENT straight from the Shelter to the Hackney Labour Exchange. There is something about a Government department that casts a shadow on the freeborn spirit. You may tell yourself that you are independent of its machinations, apart from its tyrannies, but as you approach you feel that fluttering of the heart which spells apprehension. As an indignant ratepayer you bluster and get rid of your inhibition to indignation. As a member of the destitute class no such resource is open to you. You begin to have doubts as to your right to live; you would not be surprised to read your own sentence of extermination.

I felt very oppressed when I entered the Hackney Labour Exchange. I was asked my name, business, place and date of last employment and watched, with increasing alarm, my replies being entered in the book. When it was found that I could cook, signs of animation appeared on the official countenance, but my total lack of testimonials spoiled my chance. Though my *soufflé* were light as air, it would avail me nothing without

a reference. My only hope, it seemed, was in itinerant charing, and I was given some three or four addresses and told to chance my luck. It is, I think, a testimony to the part externals play, throughout every phase of society, that during my experiences as an outcast I was never once challenged as to my *bona fides*. I was accepted at face value; my soiled raincoat covered a multitude of doubts, my shabby, pathetic little hat with a faded bunch of ribbon stopped all query, while my method of speech was by no means so out of the ordinary as people may suppose.

It is interesting to note that the majority of Londoners speak much better nowadays, than, say, within the last ten or fifteen years. Among the younger outcasts the Cockney twang is very rare; their grammar may be faulty, but their intonation is astonishingly correct. For this reason, I suppose, my own accent did not raise comment, while as for manners and customs, nowhere is a more rigid code of etiquette exacted than in a common lodging-house—as I shall have occasion to point out. To a great extent the same standard is observed in Mare Street. You ask no impertinent questions, you answer civilly when spoken to, and the newest comer waits to be addressed. At any rate, for whatever reason, I was never once challenged as to my origins. I was never asked by my companions if I had seen better days, or

interrogated as to why I had come down. Personally, I found it infinitely stimulating to be reckoned up apart from the social value set by clothes and other trifles. In the bedrock of life, these things slip past you, and you are gauged by character alone.

I remember looking at the list of addresses on that dull and bitter morning, wondering how women found the courage to go on, day after day, looking for work when I, who had been at it only for a few hours, already felt dejected. It was ten o'clock, but even so early the shadow of that problem which nightly must be faced was on me; the problem that the outcast walks with all the day—how and where to find a bed. It was this, I think, that spurred me to sudden effort. I went to the nearest place; a dull, unhappy looking house, let out in floors. The mistress apparently did not like the look of me—at any rate she said she had not any work. I suddenly felt utterly valueless—it was the bitterest slap that I had ever had. Hurt vanity, cold and fatigue (remember I had not slept all night), had brought me to a sorry pass. I have always tried to endure physical hardship without flinching, but ever since my childhood there has been one thing I cannot bear without tears. When my hands get frozen, so that my nails ache with the cold, I inevitably weep! It is a deplorable confession, and I regret it—but it is so, and

on that morning I stood in Hackney Road and cried like a little child.

I did not cry for long, unheeded. I wish I had words that adequately could describe what happened, the sudden blessed sense of comfort that warmed my soul. Through my distress there loomed the large and kindly figure of a workman.

"What's wrong?" he said.

"I—I'm cold," said I.

"It's a bitter morning," he answered.

"What you wants is a cup o' cawfee."

I nodded, and more with the desire to terminate the interview than any hope of assistance, I told him that I hadn't any money.

"That's all right," he said, "I'll treat you."

There was nothing but the purest chivalry in the invitation. He was distressed that I was cold and, manlike, wanted to give me succour. He took me to one of the little eating houses which abound in Hackney, and ordered a steaming bowl of hot, sweet coffee.

"Bread and butter?" he asked, cheerily. I shook my head, I could not swallow any food. He watched me revive with real pleasure, and told me to take my time. I explained I was a cook and he encouraged me to hope for work. He was employed on the railway and, as he delicately hinted, was well able to afford to pay my score. When I had finished the coffee, with a shy gesture he offered me some coppers.

“ It'll help a bit,” said he.

I thanked him—never have thanks been more sincere—but I could not take the money, and we parted with a cheery good morning in the street outside. I suppose nothing like this could have happened outside a poor district. In a more sophisticated quarter one would have expected a less generous sequel. But my workman was of finer suff. He never even asked my name. A Knight Errant on the road of life, he gave simple and beautiful service, unsought and unrewarded.

After this, I felt prepared to wrestle with beasts at Ephesus; I determined at least I would get a charing job. Luck was with me, for at the third house I called at, I was told I could clean steps, and was given a pail of water, some hearthstone, and a flannel. I was not allowed inside the door and I set to work on one of the most hideous tasks that female flesh is heir to. And here I must protest against this business of step-cleaning; it should be abolished either by fire or Act of Parliament. It is a loathsome job, unfit for man or beast, and it has nothing of the æsthetic to condone its degradation. There can be no more hideous sight than hearthstoned steps, and I hope that everyone who indulges in such monstrosities, will have their carpets ground to pieces by the surplus white brought in from outside.

I cleaned those steps and the rage within

my heart warmed the cold water. I did them very badly—I know that—and I am not sorry. If step cleaners were less conscientious it would be a good thing for them, and “larn” householders to be content with the scrubbing brush. I was given threepence for the job and then with a sudden, kindly thought, the mistress added another penny.

Fourpence! The first fourpence I had ever earned by manual labour. It was a proud thought, but my hands felt horribly stiff all the same. I noticed other cleaners at work about the district—the vogue lingers in the suburbs, and gives opportunity to women on the road to earn a few pence. But I had had enough of Hackney. There was no hope of work for me there, and I could not go back to the Shelter for a second night’s lodging. Adventure called me farther on; and I did a rash deed. I spent twopence of my fourpence on a tram ride to the “Angel.”

It now became pressingly apparent that something urgent must be done. To begin with, I was very hungry; more hungry than I had been for years. Material considerations of this sort do not usually affect women of the middle-class—food descends like manna at stated intervals, often to be grumbled at. But to a woman without a home, with only the streets as a permanent abiding place, food (with sleep) is the main interest of existence. I stood at the top of the Pentonville Road and wondered how I should get a

meal. And then inspiration seized me. I went into a tobacconist's and bought two boxes of matches; it would be a strange thing if I could not make at least fifty per cent. profit.

I learnt very much in my first essay as a street saleswoman. The same principles apply to this as to other branches of commerce. You must find a new angle of approach. It is worse than useless to stand in the gutter, a pile of match-boxes in your outstretched hand, an anguished look upon your stony face; such tactics merely irritate. The passer-by reasons that if he buys a box, a whole pile will still remain, and his few pence will do but little to mitigate the whole sum of your misery. No, the secret of success is this: stand on the pavement—if you are quiet and well-behaved the police will not interfere with you—your matches in your pocket, keep a sharp look out and choose your man. Then, when you see a likely victim, bear down upon him with a bright smile and a cheery word, and a hundred to one you will land him. That afternoon I did quite well. I sold my matches for fourpence each, a net profit of sixpence, and then, heedlessly rash, I went to an eating house and gorged on sausage and onions.

There are quite a number of match-sellers who have not thought out their technique at all, but continue, day after day, at the same pitch, with the same hopeless look of wretched-

ness. The older hands have developed a sturdy kind of cheeriness. One old lady of my acquaintance has evolved a heavy jollity that carries all before it. She is one of the privileged few who are admitted to some of the West End bars, and she always sells her wares. She is wise enough to insist that the purchasers shall keep their matches. It rankles in the mind of the most generous man if he is continually called on to hand over money—even the smallest sum—without value received. This consideration is by no means regarded by all the merchants of the kerb. There is an ill-tempered woman in the West End who audibly curses any customer who takes matches in return for money. She has a fine flow of invective and it is amusing to hear her, but, broadly and generally, the method cannot be recommended.

There are a certain number of women who, day after day, sell matches. Others like myself take it up as an odd job to help them over a bad stile. It is astonishing, however, that so many manage to make some sort of a living, though very few achieve even the semblance of a home. For the outcast has no abiding place ; and always, in hot or cold weather, when it is wet and when it is dry, there remains the eternal problem—where and how to get a bed.

That particular problem was pressing on me acutely when I came out of the eating

house. I went to the nearest Labour Exchange and went through the same performance as at Hackney. There was no chance of my getting a place as cook, but they gave me the address of a flat near Rosebury Avenue, where a charwoman was required. It was one of those sad-looking flats which seem to be furnished in a monotone of drab. The lady of the house was drab also, even her little baby daughter was of the same depressing hue. She gazed at me with a cold, appraising eye, and I realised she did not regard me as a human person ; I was merely someone to do the dirty work. Well, I did it. I laboured hard for over an hour. I swept the flat, I washed the kitchen and the passage, beat the mats and shook a fair-sized carpet out of the window, cleaned the knives and peeled some potatoes. During the whole hour I was never left one moment alone. The woman stood and watched me, and I could feel suspicion oozing from her every pore. Suspicion that intrinsically I was a thief and only wanted opportunity to pocket a potato, secrete a knife, or make away with the carpet.

I have always understood that it is an unwritten law for an itinerant char to be offered tea, and secretly I hoped my employer would observe the tradition. Vain illusion, absurd expectancy ! Such a thought never occurred to her. It would doubtless have been, from her point of view, a serious violation of the

social code. Her husband, I think, must have been a bank clerk, or, possibly, in the insurance world, and people were tabulated carefully in her estimation. There are, as I discovered, very many women just like this. They are quite unmoved by the hunger or misfortune of a fellow woman, unless she be of their own class. Outside their particular little preserve misfortune does not exist. She told me that would do for the day and offered me ninepence. As a good trades unionist, I demanded the market rate of a shilling.

“ I shan’t pay any more than ninepence,” the hard-faced woman said coldly, and I was too tired to argue the point. I was beginning to appreciate what it means to do manual labour for a living. I suppose I was still influenced by my normal valuation of ninepence, otherwise I cannot account for my inexcusable extravagance. I actually bought myself a cup of tea and a piece of cake, which reduced my capital to fourpence ! Four coppers between me and a night in the street. It sounds romantic, but there is a grim hardness about the reality, difficult, if not impossible, for inexperience to gauge. When one has become acclimatised to being homeless, the bed problem, though always there, is less urgent, but I was still too new to take things philosophically. It had begun to rain, and to be on the streets when it is wet is to touch the very dregs of misery.

Later I was to find myself very often in the same predicament, but it is always the first impact that tells, and I began to be just a little frightened. I spent my fourpence on four boxes of matches and walked from King's Cross to the Holborn end of Shaftesbury Avenue. It was a favourite hunting ground of mine in my outcast days, not so crowded as Piccadilly Circus and with far less competition, and generally I found it lucky.

I hung about the pavement, but my star was not in the ascendant, I could not spot a likely client. My judgment seemed to leave me, I lost initiative and the result was immediately apparent. None of the passers-by reacted to me—I was just one of the crowd and, therefore, negligible. The same sort of thing happens at any social gathering. You either make yourself felt or you are unnoticed; if you do not project your personality, the stream passes by and leaves you on one side.

I had almost relapsed into the woe-begone condition that I have described above when of a sudden the feeling that I *must* do something roused me. Two of my match-boxes were soaked through, which reduced my chances of a bed by half. I put them in my pocket, took myself firmly in hand, and assumed a bright demeanour. I studied the faces of the men who passed me as closely as though I were interviewing them for a job, but I did not feel that answering spark of

reciprocity which tells you have registered an impression, until coming towards me from Piccadilly I saw a young man and a girl. They were young and obviously in love, and perfectly indifferent to streaming rain, though neither had an umbrella. I went forward quickly and thrust a box in front of the young man with a smile and a joking word.

Just for an instant Fate trembled in the balance—and then the young man took the matches and handed me a shilling, and I was saved.

It will doubtless be noticed that I have particularised “men” when discussing how to deal with prospective buyers. I do not mention women for the reason that I never found any of my own sex who would buy from me. Very soon I gave up trying, for it was not only their refusal to spend a penny that was hurtful, but their very obvious belief in my utter worthlessness. It is curious, but it is true, that the majority of our sex cannot judge a woman apart from her surroundings. Had any of the “ladies” who looked at me with such repulsion found me living in a poor, but clean room in obvious but decent destitution, I feel sure that they would have given me every help, but to the eyes of the ordinary woman environment is what counts and for that reason I have found it very difficult to enlist the support of my own sex for their sisters without a home.

Now, it is not only the condition of the public lodging-houses of which I have to complain, but the utter inadequacy of their number in relation to the homeless population.*

*I append a precis of the figures relating to sleeping accommodation in Public Lodging Houses, licensed by the L.C.C. throughout London. It will be seen that of the total accommodation the percentage available for women is only 9.42.

Borough.	Total No of persons accommodated	Comprising		Men's % of total accommodation.	Women's % of total accommodation.	Remarks
		Men	Women			
Stepney	3613	3306	307		8.50	+ 123 couples
Southwark	2758	2315	443		16.06	
Westminster	1538	1481	57		3.70	+ 2 children
Holborn	1093	1015	78		7.14	
Deptford	1089	1020	69		6.34	
Bermondsey	853	853	—		—	
Islington	793	767	26		3.28	
St. Marylebone	763	654	109		14.29	
Poplar	499	499	—		—	
Finsbury	470	470	—		—	
Camberwell	438	438	—		—	
Kensington	416	195	221		53.12	
Lambeth	415	340	75		18.07	
Woolwich	404	346	58		14.36	+ 5 children
Bethnal Green	395	395	—		—	
Hackney	313	313	—		—	
Hammersmith	292	292	—		—	
Shoreditch	281	281	—		—	
Battersea	201	135	66		32.83	
Chelsea	172	172	—		—	
Paddington	165	128	37		22.42	
Wandsworth	94	94	—		—	
Greenwich	90	90	—		—	
Fulham	87	36	51		58.62	
St. Pancras	78	45	33		42.31	
	17,310	1,5680	1,630		9.42	

The centre and West End of London is served only by one licensed establishment, in Kennedy Court, off Holborn. There are very few on the north side of the river. The south side is better served, but the total number of these places is extraordinarily small when we remember that there are perennially some thousands of women without permanent sleeping accommodation, women who, when they can earn enough for a lodging, should surely be able to find one within reasonable distance of any part of London.

I was quite at sea as to where I could get a bed, and, as usual, I took counsel with the nearest policeman. Under his direction I found my way to a place, the like of which I could not have imagined.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE IN KENNEDY COURT

SOMEWHERE at the back of the Holborn Restaurant—out of one of those queer streets that seem off the map of London—there is a paved court. Tumble-down dwellings surround it, swarming with humanity, and when you enter through the archway you feel you might be in Montmartre. At the top of the court there is a wooden door with a latch. Lift the latch and you will find yourself in a world of which the ordinary well-fed man or woman has no knowledge.

It is the kitchen of the L.C.C.-inspected lodging house in Kennedy Court.

The floor is of asphalt, the walls white-washed, with a shelf running round at easy distance from the ground—just the right height for tired backs to lean against. In front of the shelf are wooden benches, straight and uncompromising, and every evening these are closely packed with women. The first night I went there I came straight from the bitter rain into the blaze of a huge coke fire jutting out into the room, which is lit by a dim gas burner that occasionally flames into erratic brightness.

Through dark arches on either side of the fireplace is a vista of another room, gloomy and chill. Here come the homeless who have collected the price of a bed.

The place was crowded when I entered, but I was not stared at, and nobody minded when I asked a woman near the door if I might sit down. She gave me a cheery welcome, and invited me to get warm. In the world of the destitute there is a diversity of morals, but only one code of manners. You ask no questions; a new-comer speaks only when spoken to; and observes a due diffidence in the choice of a seat, respectfully keeping at a distance from the fire. Moreover, criticism is ruled out. The woman next you may be a gaol-bird, a pickpocket, a hard-working office cleaner, an itinerant char or street vendor, or, as often happened, just a prostitute. It makes no difference. You never comment—you observe, listen and try to understand.

That night, it seemed to me, every type was present. Women in the raw, emotionally speaking, expressing themselves without reserve, in a tongue that has a knife behind each word. The majority of my fellow lodgers were young, pretty and attractively dressed. They all wore sunset silk stockings from the very cheapest kind to a better variety. Their slim little frocks were well cut, and their coats, save for the quality,

might have been bought in the West End. There was a sprinkling of elderly women and a few middle-aged. They all sat about and talked and laughed, and occasionally one of the girls would go out and return with chocolate, fruit, or a bottle of lemonade. Intoxicants must not be brought into a public lodging house. It is one of the few rules which the L.C.C. insist should be observed.

A decrepit old creature in black, who might have been hundreds of years old, rose from her seat by the fire and shuffled towards me. She was an "official" of the house, paid by the proprietor, and kept a close espionage on all his clients.

"Have you paid for your bed?" she asked. It is a parrot cry, which punctuates all the emotional stress and storm occasionally let loose in that queer kitchen.

"It's one and tuppence," she quavered. "Go to the window up the courtyard and ask for bed number 28. Don't forget it's one and tuppence."

You can imagine how thankfully I fingered the two coppers I had received for my last box of matches. In the cruel cold of that night, the warm, close kitchen seemed a paradise. Another old woman sat at a table by the open window up in the courtyard. She took my money and I waited for a ticket or some form of receipt. I need not

have troubled, however. There seems to be some subtle form of communication between the window and the aged crone, for if ever some poor thing tries to get a bed on the nod, insisting to "Ida" that she has deposited the cash, the ruse always fails.

"You haven't paid your money!" That high-pitched, quavering voice must sound to many like the trump of doom.

The kitchen was still more crowded when I returned, and I listened to a babel of voices. Very few of the women were Londoners, they mostly seemed to hail from the provinces. Quite a number from Liverpool, some from Wales and Ireland with bonny Scotland holding its own. A sturdy young woman with bright eyes was industriously making up her face. She wore the inevitable sunset stockings and her patent shoes, brightly polished, were painfully thin.

"I've had awful bad luck to-day," she said. "But I'm going to have another shot before I turn in. There'll be time before the pubs close to go up to the park, and maybe, I'll get a man to buy me a drink."

A dark faced, bobbed haired girl said she would go too, though, as she explained, she was rather tired, and had already walked from Hendon, where, among other things, she had been shying for cocoanuts. With the lavish generosity of her type, she handed round large pieces which we all accepted

The two went off together to try their luck, I hoped sincerely they already had the price of their beds. There was something inexpressibly tragic in the thought that these two young things had to go to the park, not for a drink alone, but to earn a pitifully small sum for the hire of their bodies.

Several girls came in to "arrange their faces," and one, a very slender, piquant creature, took out of her Dorothy bag an entire set of silk underclothing, which she had washed at the public baths and brought into the kitchen to dry. She held them before the coke fire, chatting the while of her experiences.

"Any luck, dearie?" said a soft-voiced Irishwoman.

"No, luck's right out," said the slim one. "I tell you I'm getting fed up with bits and scraps of things. I haven't had a whole night with a man for six weeks." She made the statement with a complete frankness that had not the least touch of obscenity, and her sentiment was generally applauded. You must understand that the attitude of these young people towards sex cannot be described as immoral; nor is it immoral. It is the result of the will to live; they are unable to keep themselves in any other manner. They have their own code of ethics, a rigid one, which demands an irrevocable

decision not to let a pal down, and never in any circumstances whatsoever to interfere with other people's business or give away their affairs. Business, generally speaking, seemed to be very dull, from what I gathered. A Lancashire lass with a strong burr sighed piteously for Liverpool.

"I'd go back there to-night, if I only had the fare," said she.

"Maybe you'll get enough to go up for the Grand National," said the cheery little lady still drying her underwear before the fire. "I wonder now, if I was to meet the Prince of Wales, do you think he'd give me a pound if he wanted me?"

One of the elderly women—an office cleaner as I afterwards learned—answered the naïve query.

"He couldn't give you a pound, my dear, however much he wanted to. The royal family never have no money of their own; they pay everything through their secretaries. You'd just have to send in the bill."

"Not half," said the cheery girl. "*I* wouldn't give him away to Queen Mary."

It was at this moment that an emotional tornado broke upon the kitchen. These atmospheric disturbances are not uncommon among the homeless. Circumstances force them to lead highly concentrated lives in that they must seize on the moment when they find it—the moment which gives them

the shelter of a roof, however pitifully impermanent.

The door was flung wide open, and a good-looking young woman in a dilapidated fur coat and battered feathered hat burst in. She flung a brown paper parcel on the floor with a gesture of tragedy.

"There it is," she cried, "my old man's washing—I tell you he won't want it again for sixteen months."

She was all strung up as she spoke, and then, suddenly, she collapsed, and crouching down on the bench beside the parcel began to cry. I have never seen a woman cry as she did. The most emotional outburst of the women of the middle class is reticent, almost austere, by contrast. It seemed an intrusion, somehow, to witness such devastating grief. Her body shook with big sobs, interspersed with coughs, sneezings and other primitive methods of expression. All conventional barriers were down—the woman was raw, bleeding, utterly unable to hold herself in.

I cannot repeat her language. It is not printable, but as I listened it did not shock me. I understood the violence of the feeling that moved her. I understood also why she had to cry out then and there without leaving one method of relief sealed up. To-morrow she might be homeless. There might be no place in which to weep, vituperate or despair. It is the tragedy of the destitute that when

there is a roof above their heads they must seize the chance to give voice to their emotions—emotions that we can take our time to think about, nicely to express and delicately to restrain. For consider—can you cry out in the street, shriek your agony to the pavements, raise your streaming eyes to the sky? Such demonstration comes within the definition of “a disturbance,” and she who shows her heart rent and bleeding, runs the risk of arrest—not to mention gaol. I am not here pleading that women should be allowed violently to weep in public places; I only say that emotional intemperance is inevitable if a woman has no home.

Presently she began to tell her story.

“The devils from Scotland Yard have got my Arthur sixteen months. They came into court this morning and told—bloody lies.”

“Lies, is it,” said the Irishwoman. “Sure God Almighty’s truth ’ud choke ’em, the—bastards.”

“He’ll be six months in Wandsworth and nine in the Isle of Wight,” moaned the wife.

“But he knows the ropes; he’s done a stretch before, remember,” said a friend. “Besides, it’s not as if you didn’t know what it was like; you’ve done your bit, too, my girl.”

“That’s so, and everybody likes my Arthur, but—but I want him—oh, I want him!”

She hugged the soiled packet of washing in her arms, and then threw it across the room. "Take it, Sally," she said to a pretty girl. "I can't bear to touch it now he's gone from me."

She sobbed on and on, and no one ventured near her. It is not manners to interfere. Some of the women continued their conversation in undertones, others waited, listening sympathetically, and then at last the Irish-woman chipped in.

"It's not my business, I know, dear, and I've no call to speak to you, but I wouldn't cry if I was you, it'll hurt your stomach something cruel."

The woman stared with streaming eyes, the racking sobs continued. At this moment the aged crone by the fireside felt it time to sound the official note.

"You haven't paid for your bed," she said.

A look of furtive distress crossed the woman's face—I suppose she felt the street was very near.

"I haven't paid yet, Ida," she said, "but I've got the money—only do let me have my cry out, or it won't come."

Gradually she grew quieter; suddenly she started to her feet, began to laugh at the top of her bent, and, producing a parcel from under her coat, handed round a selection of pigs' trotters.

Evanescent feeling? Easy tears? Hysterical outburst? Not a bit of it. Wait until you have no home to cry in, and then you will understand. Wait until you have walked about the streets, cut off from your kind as completely as though you were in a desert. Wait until, by a rare piece of luck, you get the money to pay for a bed, and can claim something of that community of interest and affection which goes by the name of home. Then, no sooner is your foot beyond the threshold, be it the kitchen of Kennedy Court, a doss house in the Waterloo Bridge Road, or any of the public lodging places, you will let fling, and laugh and scream and scoff, releasing the pent-up emotions of long and weary hours.

I want to make it quite plain that my friend of the pigs' trotters was not in the least degree under the influence of drink. Throughout my adventures in the underworld, I did not meet a drunken woman. There is a fixed idea also that those poor little prostitutes, with their pitiful earnings of pence and shillings (it is an event if they should get a pound), spend a large proportion of their income in alcoholic refreshment. This is not so. The girls I met at Kennedy Court, like those I met at Camden Town, the Old Kent Road and all over London, are very moderate in their spirituous tastes. There is a freehanded dispensation of choco-

late, and they are extravagant in the matter of fruitdrops and lemonade, but they rarely buy drink for themselves, and there is not much cigarette smoking. The causes for this abstinence may be economic, though, personally, I do not believe that shortage of money affects the manner in which that money is spent. If a woman wants drink, be she in the possession of fourpence, four shillings or four pounds, drink she will have. But, as I say, it is not a craving from which these pretty young prostitutes suffer.

The level of discussion in any public lodging house is not high. Small interest is shown in politics, and, save to a few women who have obviously drifted from different social strata, literature is a sealed book. Fashion is a fruitful topic of interest, and the passion for cross-word puzzles, or the immediate equivalent, runs very high. Local gossip always holds the attention. So and so's mother's adventure with the lodger—the prospect of a job for a young sister—plans for the future when your own or a friend's man comes out of gaol. Over and over again these things are talked over, and, save when an emotional tornado breaks up the calm, the conversation is leisurely, one might say spacious.

Only once did I meet a woman actuated by any interest in ideas. Ideas do not easily

flourish on a starvation diet, and all the energies of the outcast are bent towards the problem of board and bed. This particular woman was about five and forty, tall, well built, with a face that had been beautiful and was still arresting. Ida had just shifted a new-comer to bed before she wished to go there—a discipline from which I also suffered, though I managed to evade the clutching hand a little longer.

The complainant testified long, loud and very bitterly.

“ She’s always interfering, that old woman ! You can’t get a thing in this place unless you pay for it through the nose ; she won’t let you have a drop of hot water unless you give her some coppers, and if you don’t tip the old cat she reports you, and you may find yourself chucked out.”

“ It’s all very well to complain,” said the older woman, “ but it’s your own fault, every one of you. You sit there and talk about her when she’s out of the room, and when she comes back you haven’t a word to say. You ought to go in a body and make a complaint to the man who employs her and makes his money letting beds to us. That’s what’s the matter with women the world over ; they grumble among themselves, and when it comes to showing fight, they turn tail and run away. Its always been the same story ; it’s like that in life as well as

in this place. That's why men will beat us every time."

She swept out of the kitchen on the closing words, and someone mentioned that she was not coming back that night. She hadn't any money.

"Poor Alice! It's a shame—she's always so generous with her cash. I'd have lent her a bob myself, only as like as not she'd bite my head off. It's all very well for her to talk—people are afraid of her tongue; there's something about Alice that you can't get over, she's different to us."

I never discovered the story of Alice. I do not believe her life holds any dark mystery or hideous secret. I should think she had drifted from the professional classes for purely economic reasons, and that her tragedy, like so many others, is merely lack of means.

Destitution in most cases brings a furtive manner, an air that arouses immediate suspicion. I found myself acquiring that same manner after a very little while, so that when I was faced by an official I answered as though I were afraid (indeed, I sometimes was), and instead of entering a room in my usual fashion, I would slink round the doorway and sit humbly on the edge of a chair. By these, my own experiences, I learned how easy it is to form cruelly wrong conclusions from certain obvious facts. A straight glance of the eye, a clear tone in the voice, an assured

and ready bearing ; these are but the manifestations of a well-fed life. Take away your regular meals, your comfortable bed, your sense of security, and you will find yourself like any other outcast, slinking along the pavement, shrinking from attention, utterly void of that self-confidence which is the hall mark of success.

I succeeded in evading Ida's tender care for some time, but at last the hour struck. She beckoned me with her claw-like hand.

"Now, Miss Twenty Eight," said she, "it's time you went to bed."

I followed her along the courtyard, through a sinister-looking door and up a flight of stone steps, on to a landing, from which opened a room which led into two others. My sleeping place was on the first floor. The floors above were planned much in the same way. Three beds stood in a row with one bed across the foot. Mine was next to the wall, farthest from the door. The floor was clean, but that is all that can be said in regard to cleanliness. My bed was very hard, lumpy and badly stained. The sheets obviously had been slept in many times, there were no pillow cases, and the blankets were so short that you had to choose between cold feet and icy shoulders. There was no washing accommodation in the room where I slept, but at the end of the adjoining room there was a washstand which apparently had

to serve all the inmates on that floor. The only other means of washing is in a scullery, off the courtyard, where tin lavatory basins are provided, and only cold water is laid on.

Consider for a moment what this means. A woman goes to bed with all the day's dirt and fatigue upon her. In the morning if she desires to wash—and who does not?—she has to choose between dabbing herself in a limited supply of water or going downstairs across the courtyard and into the scullery. Which means that she must dress to go downstairs—you carry your wardrobe with you—and undress again on a flagged floor in the cruel cold of a winter's morning. The man who goes to a public lodging house is very differently placed. He can have a hot bath, and, if he wishes, wash his shirt or pants and dry them in a hot-air closet in a few minutes. Woman, whose physical formation calls for more scrupulous cleanliness than man, is shut off from access to soap and water unless she is prepared to stand the unpleasant conditions above described.

This lack of washing accommodation is not confined to Kennedy Court. Women's public lodging houses are all deficient in this respect, though the establishments run by religious bodies are generally better equipped.

For the accommodation I have outlined—the use of a soiled bed, cold water and the

lodging house kitchen—the charge is one shilling and twopence a night. This is an economic rent ; eight and twopence a week for the use of a bed, is sufficient to provide clean sheets, proper bathrooms and human conditions. But even on the plea of good business I have been unable to get anyone to move in this matter. Thus, within a stone's throw of the most luxurious part of London, you have a condition of things differing in essentials very little from the slums. And what I have said as to Kennedy Court holds good in varying degrees about the other lodging houses.

The process of undressing for the outcast is simple. A dim gas mantle gave an irritating light which enabled me darkly to follow the movements of my room mates. The general custom is to sleep—in the winter at all events—in all your clothes, removing your hat and shoes for the sake of courtesy. The younger girls take off their outer garments sometimes, but the older hands cling tightly to every stitch ; a course—as I was subsequently to discover—highly to be commended.

I produced a nightgown from my brown paper parcel, and placed my clothes at the end of the bed, from whence at intervals they slipped on to the floor, to be recaptured by my groping hand, only to slide off once again. It must have been about two o'clock before the last vacant bed was filled. Downstairs

in the kitchen high jinks were in progress ; they were singing songs, dancing and generally enjoying life.

“ It’s an awful noise, dear, isn’t it ? ” said the latest comer. She spoke with refinement, so much refinement that she was almost “ naice.”

“ One does not sleep in such a place as this from choice,” she continued. “ I have never been here before but once.”

“ It isn’t very comfortable,” I agreed, and watched her divest herself of two coats, two skirts, and other articles of apparel, all in duplicate.

“ No, I don’t care to go into the room downstairs, and let all those women see me. They’re not fit to associate with, dear. But, as I say, in these hard times, one can’t afford four and sixpence for a night’s lodging ; things have changed since the war.”

By this time she was in her petticoat. She stared at me curiously from the other side of the bed. I don’t think she altogether liked the look of me, for she solemnly re-invested herself in two of everything, and complacently got in between the sheets, fully clothed.

“ I have a flat of my own, dear, beautifully appointed, electric light and hot and cold. But nowadays tradespeople are so tiresome ; and I’ve had to leave it. You see I can’t go back because they insist I must settle their bills. That,” she said, with a spacious gesture, “ is why I wear my two costumes.”

Presently the old crone extinguished the defective gas mantle, the noise died away from the kitchen downstairs, and Kennedy Court composed itself to slumber. I slept, but fitfully. I had not dreamt there were so many women without habitation or home, and the knowledge that, purely through force of circumstances, and by no individual merit, I was in possession of both, rankled—a sore injustice. Why should these young girls, these elderly women, be cut off from those things without which the soul cannot flower? Why should I, and so many hundreds like me, sleep softly and securely while their dragging feet walked the pavement, or, at best, found soiled shelter for the night?

The tragedy of the outcast came very close to me next morning. Ida woke us up about nine, and from under the clothes my room mates emerged, like full fledged chrysalis, completely clothed. The lady of the flat was not very cheerful. Like the rest, she dressed herself entirely in bed—an art that cannot easily be learned—and then, when the second coat was buttoned and she crawled from the dirty sheets, she began to cry.

“ Aren’t you well? ” I asked, and felt the utter feebleness of the words.

“ Oh, my dear,” she said, “ it’s the walking about, the walking about. Day after day, it’s always the same.”

And this is the sort of thing that goes on

among the homeless. Walking about until the body aches and the mind becomes half doped. Is it any wonder that to get shelter at night the destitute do desperate things? This woman was not, I think, a prostitute, save at such times when self-preservation drove her to get money anyhow. I should say she had once been a shop assistant, or, perhaps, kept a lodging house. One seemed to trace her steady declension, slipping from room to room, at a cheaper and cheaper rent, and always leaving something behind, until at last, her whole wealth on her back, she is faced with destitution.

Soon one of the costumes will have to go. It will be necessary to sell it for food or shelter. And then her boots will begin to disintegrate, her remaining costume will grow dirty, she will be unable to change her underwear, and finally, perhaps she will be discovered in the street in a state of collapse. Not improbably, she will be charged at the police station for being without visible means of support. If she is lucky she will be sent to the workhouse; if things are against her, she may go to prison. In any case the interregnum will be a short one; and she will emerge into the light of day to resume the walking about, the never-ending, monotonously-grinding walking about.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRICE OF A BED

THE young, pretty prostitute of the humbler walks of harlotry is a growing problem. The older women, who have long graduated in the profession, are of a different category; with these I did not come into contact, except in one or two instances where circumstances had pushed them from comparative prosperity into destitution. The type of girl I encountered in the public lodging houses is, as a rule, fresh, amusing and very friendly.

How do they find themselves members of this calling? The reasons are various; but sheer vice is not one of them. Viciousness is generally accompanied by a peculiarly cold commercial sense, which very speedily increases a woman's earning capacity in this particular walk of life. The majority of girls are victims of circumstance. I do not mean that they have had illegitimate children, but that accident has pushed them into their position. A number of them have been domestic servants who have stayed out late on their evening off, and been too apprehensive to return after the appointed hour. In some cases these girls find refuge in a Salvation

Army Shelter, but, very often, things turn out differently. It is not difficult for an attractive young thing to form an acquaintance, and in sheer high spirits and love of fun she will go to lengths she had never contemplated, and wake up the next morning in a man's bed.

Once this has happened, it is very difficult for a girl to get back to routine work. To begin with, she will have no reference, for—and this is an important point—in the majority of instances she will not face her former mistress and give a tangible account of her absence, nor will she tell the truth. Most girls in such a case prefer to lose the wages due to them and forfeit their clothes—and the pressure of hard facts soon sends them on to the street.

I have mentioned that many of these girls come from the North of England, particularly from Liverpool. The explanation for this is interesting. In Liverpool, as elsewhere, if a girl be convicted a number of times for solicitation, she is more or less marked down by the police, and the surveillance renders it difficult, if not impossible, for her to approach likely clients. For this reason she migrates to London with its larger area and its many avenues of escape from official espionage. As a rule, it is but rarely that this type of prostitute is arrested. Of necessity she plies her trade in out-of-the-way spots, not venturing into competition with

her more opulent sisters of Shaftesbury Avenue and Piccadilly.

A very high standard of generosity obtains among them, and much devotion, even heroism. A Scotswoman whom I met in a North London lodging house told me that "her man" had lost both his legs in the war. He had come down from his native place to London where he had secured admission to an institution. They had hoped to get married, and when he was maimed from the war she was heart-broken. She could not live without him and followed him to London without a penny and without work. She took the way of prostitution to keep body and soul together. He did not know what she did, and every visiting day would welcome her with unfailing affection. He was a heavy smoker and she could never get him enough tobacco. She would go without food to buy him cigarettes; indeed, she only lived for those few hours twice weekly when she forgot everything but her love. She was not a showy-looking girl; she was built on peasant lines, and one felt she would make a splendid mother of sturdy sons. Her avocation had not dulled her mind or coarsened her manner. I do not think her soul, in any sense, was seared by what she did.

"What else can I do?" she asked me, her wide eyes staring.

And this is the question which must be

faced in any discussion of social conditions. The usual alternative to the streets offered to the prostitute is work at a wash-tub. "Homes for Fallen Women"—the name emblazoned all over the building—lay great stress on the curative properties of a laundry. Clear starching, it would seem, cleanses all sin, and an expert ironer can cheerfully put her record behind her. It is thought, apparently, that residence in a place of this description, where femininity is herded together, devoid of that cold, brutal masculinity without which women in the herd cannot keep sane, will purge them of all desire for their old calling. Frankly, the majority of them have no "desire" for prostitution. If they could get their living any other way and, at the same time, retain their liberty of action, there would not be much hesitation. But it is not feasible to expect that a young woman should prefer the undiluted society of her own sex, varied by long arduous hours of physical toil, to the chances of a life of adventure, even though that life means frequently going without a bed.

I think the only avenue of hope lies in a different direction. In the first place a number of public lodging houses, properly sanitated and equipped, should be established. These could be run on the lines which at present obtain; the necessary payment being the only qualification for admission. There

could be, however, an official attached to the house to whom the girls could go for advice, if they wanted any. There should not be the least hint of compulsion, but an unprejudiced woman of good manners and humanity, in such circumstances, might be of real assistance. If, for instance, a girl has a taste for dressmaking—and so many of them do wonders with their needle—the Registrar or Secretary, whatever her title might be, could take a note of the applicant's qualifications and put her in touch with a firm in need of a hand. This is but one branch of commerce for which these young and quick-brained creatures would be eligible. There is plenty of capacity among them, and, as I have said, very little vice. What has happened to them is what happens to many. They have missed the train of life at a certain junction and have been left behind. The least little assistance—proffered frankly and uncoloured by preaching—would help them catch the train at the next stopping place. Stern, inflexible officialdom, the solution of the reformatory, institution, or "Fallen Home," is worse than useless; they are all tarred with the same brush; they all postulate the same thing—that the prostitute is intrinsically evil and must be purged by fire. It is the entire absence of moral superiority that gives the Salvation Army such a great influence. Your social reformer wants always to reform; the

Salvation Army, so far as I know it, wants only to help. There is a whole world of difference in the result of these two opposite ideals.

An astonishingly high standard of self-respect is maintained among these girls. Directly they earn a shilling they will spend fourpence of it in a bath. They neglect no opportunity of washing their underwear, and their clothes are carefully brushed, indeed I have often wondered how they manage to appear so spick and span. I have been in the kitchen of a lodging house and seen a girl whom I met a few days before, enter almost dead with exhaustion. She has been two nights without a bed and has staggered into the kitchen for half-an-hour's rest before she "walks" again. Her feet are swollen and bleeding, the cheap silk stockings all in holes, but she still maintains a meticulous neatness about her small hat and her cheap coat and frock. Powder, rouge and lipstick repair the ravages of fatigue, a borrowed needle and cotton deal with the stockings and she sets forth again looking like a rose refreshed. Their clothes are of the cheapest, generally bought from the little shops in Soho, or in the East End of London. The material is not high class, cotton plays a great part in its composition, but the cut is very good, and not always supplied by the tailor. Very often the girl will alter it herself, with a

companion's help and the aid of a few pins. So much comprehension, such amazing generosity, such swift compassion; all wasted in prostitution for the want of common-sense, help and understanding.

Furthermore, at the risk of repetition, I must state again that there is little or no drinking among this type of prostitute, and that the root cause of their condition is an economic one. It will be argued, very rightly, that a little strength of mind, a small amount of courage, would have saved them from such a plight. The domestic who has outstayed her allotted hour; the girl who has slipped out of her home; the nursery governess who has taken French leave, all these could have retrieved their position had they faced the music. But unless you have been in direct contact with the type of which I am writing, you cannot understand how difficult, if not impossible, it is for them to approach a woman of a different social caste. Embedded in their psychology is the belief that their employer will, and must, not only censure, but punish their lapse from duty, and in the main their belief is right. The average mistress, faced by her domestic after a night's absence, or even part of a night, would inevitably tell her to go without further notice. It is to avoid this unpleasantness that the defaulting absentee does not return. She prefers to join the ranks of the destitute.

The older women, not of the prostitute class, who frequent lodging houses are semi-permanents. These semi-permanents have regular, if poorly paid work. They are office cleaners, jobbing laundresses, daily cooks at cheap restaurants. The money they pay per week for their bed would rent a room in a poor locality, but even if such accommodation were available, and they could collect the necessary furniture, there is one overwhelming obstacle to such a mode of life. For the single woman well on to middle age, to live alone is to court a desolation of spirit that saps vitality. The loneliness of such an existence is intolerable. Few of these odd women have friends, or even acquaintances ; they sustain their hold on life through the younger women whom they meet at the lodging house. They feed their emotions on the emotions of these others, gaining a spurious excitement from their tragedies and amusements.

It is not only in the public lodging house that you find this particular phenomenon. You will find elderly spinsters and childless widows in all grades of society preying on the vitality of the young. Lack of occupation, in these latter cases, intensifies the desire for sensation and, whereas the office cleaner is content to observe her younger and attractive sisters, the middle class woman of certain, if small income, with nothing to do,

actively oppresses her unfortunate friends and relations. The same morbid condition is noticeable in widows who have lost their husbands and sons and with them that sense of superiority which comes from male appreciation. In such cases it is the daughters who pay; for the mother, to sustain emotional contact with life, leaves very little opportunity for their privacy of feeling. But among outcasts you find a bond of fellowship almost as close and as elastic as the comradeship of man with man. They have that respect for liberty of action and privacy of thought which among women of ordered and leisured lives is rarely met with. They are void of that desire of possession which mars so many friendships. They desire to possess their own lives, they shrink from the responsibility of possessing their neighbours. So keen is this appreciation of spiritual aloofness, that it is hopeless for anybody to attempt to offer them material assistance, who does not share that same passion. Until this underlying fact is recognised, all attempts at what is known as rescue work will be unavailing.

The third class of destitute—the itinerant match-vendors—rarely come to the one and twopenny type of lodging house. They simply have not the means. They go to the unlicensed doss house, which still secretly flourishes in the backways of the city. They

go also to a huge shelter in Whitechapel, concerning which I shall have much to say. But be they prostitute, office cleaner, or match-seller—whether they pay a few pence or a larger sum—they all suffer from the same crying and shameful injustice ; the inadequacy of accommodation, the lack of proper bathrooms, the glaring inequality which supplies the outcast male with the decencies of life and denies them to women.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLACK PLUSH COAT

WHEN I left the lodging house in Kennedy Court I had no money, and my sole stock-in-trade consisted of the two boxes of matches, which, soaked by the last night's rain, were now dry. I got them off my hands at two-pence each; it was too early in the day to get a better price—men grow more generous as the evening approaches!

I craved for a cup of coffee, but I was stern with myself; I would not run the risk of spending half my capital. I therefore bought four more boxes of matches, and determined to effect a speedy sale. I was not content, however, to accept my failure to get employment as a cook as final. Good cooks are always in demand and, as I have said before—I am an extremely good cook. I regard the production of a well-thought-out repast as a piece of creative work every bit as important as a chapter in a novel, let alone a triolet. Why, therefore, should I be debarred from practising my vocation? Surely this was an occasion when personality should be able to surmount the difficulties

arising from the absence of what is known as a "character?"

I sold my matches well that day. I got fourpence for two and sixpence for two, and I bought myself a hunch of bread and cheese and a cup of coffee at a Lockhart's. The food is very good in these establishments, much better and cheaper than at far more imposing places. It is a question, as Bernard Shaw said years ago, of whether you prefer nine-pennyworth of tablecloth and three-pennyworth of food for your shilling, or *vice versa*. The service is negligible at Lockhart's, and the table implements are not at all refined, but your food and drink are both steaming hot, and the company has a rough and ready humour which gives salt to the poorest meal.

I had a conversation with the manageress as to the chances of engaging me as cook. There might, she thought, be a vacancy for a washer-up, but in the higher walks of domestic economy there was nothing doing; it was a matter of a reference once again.

It is a nice point—this discrimination between the washing of dishes and their preparation. In the scullery, it would seem, absence of character does not matter; it is, I suppose, difficult to abstract a soup tureen or conceal a dish. But when it comes to the roasting of joints or the boiling of potatoes, custom steps in with a rigid hand. Alas!

there was no admission for me into anybody's kitchen, save as a hewer of wood or a drawer of water, and both these pursuits were too poorly paid for me to consider; I always went back to the match trade.

I thought it probable that I might find less rigid requirements in the foreign quarters of Soho, where little restaurants jostle small cafés in every street. In the course of my pilgrimage I visited many kitchens where succulent repasts are prepared. Dark underground places, where the temperature is like that of a hothouse and the air vibrates with dramatic directions in the French and Italian tongues. Here again I could have got work as a vegetable maid at ninepence an hour, but the employment would have been irregular, and, as I early experienced, I could make more than that in the fine art of match-selling.

I had already discovered that in Soho you can buy matches by the dozen at reduced rates, but I decided to continue my own methods. I felt that if I laid in a larger stock-in-trade my market would slump, for whether I concealed them about my person or brandished them in the face of heaven, the fact that I had matches in reserve would affect the psychology of the buyer. As a matter of form I called at various Labour Exchanges and registered as a cook. It was a hopeless quest, but I wanted to make

sure of my facts. I could, I suppose, have got a situation had I written Annie Turner a reference in my own name. But that would have been loading the dice, and I wanted to go through my adventures on the level. Therefore, I went around characterless, and found every door shut. It is a curious proof of the distrust of their own judgment that neither the officials nor the individuals to whom I applied could persuade themselves that I was not a thief. You will often hear the expression that character is written in the face, but it is only the very few who believe in the value of such testimony. For this reason I was slowly but surely being forced into the permanent calling of street vendor, from which, only by the merest chance, I found an escape.

With what was left after my meal I replenished my stock of matches, and once again made a good harvest. In possession of three shillings, I decided to try an experiment. I would see what could be done in the bar of a public house. In the majority of West End bars, street sellers are not allowed; the advent of a woman with flowers, bootlaces, or any other trifle, always causes a hubbub. The barmaids shout at her, the commissionaire hustles her, the poor thing might be a walking pestilence to judge by the disturbance. This is not a sex question, however; the male itinerant vendor

is equally taboo. The objection does not come from the customers, but from the proprietary, and I have never been able to understand the psychological reaction.

There are, however, still a few Christian public houses off Shaftesbury Avenue where street vendors are admitted. I had spotted one of these, and about eight o'clock that evening I decided to stop active business, to buy myself a drink and to look round. The bar I chose was one of those cosy places where you sit on a high stool, close to the counter, which is flanked by a buffet, groaning with good things in the cheese and biscuit line, cold beef, ham and pickles, tomatoes and French mustard. I bought myself a glass of port, biscuit and cheese, borrowed an evening paper and waited events.

Presently a bunch of men came in, all in good spirits, after a day's racing. Racing men are always kindly and most human, and I felt I was in for a good sale. I bided my time, and, when one of them started fumbling for a pipe, I intrigued the inevitable box towards him.

"Times are hard," I said, with a sweet smile.

My victim, a tall, bearded creature with blue eyes, gave a sympathetic grin.

"That's all right, my dear," he said, and handed me a shilling.

Two of his friends followed suit to the

same tune, and I was so pleased that I bought myself another port and some more biscuits.

“ You’re doing well, miss,” said the barman. (There are no barmaids in this establishment). “ Here, I’ll take a box. Will fourpence suit you ? ”

I gathered up the money with a rising pulse. For the first time I felt the joy of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest. I began to think there was a great deal in finance. Presently, a man came in selling pocket glasses and powder-puffs. I was not in a position to buy anything, so he waited till a prosperous looking man arrived, and landed him for ninepence. Meanwhile, an elderly woman seated at the other end of the counter left her stool and came towards me.

She was dressed in one of those black, plush coats which seem to go on for ages. Nothing is able to destroy them; fifty years after they are made they still flourish in undiminished vigour, though time depresses their one time glossy look. She wore a battered straw hat with a droopy feather, her complexion was leaden, but her eyes, were large and intelligent,.

“ You’ve done rather brightly with your matches,” said she.

“ Yes,” I answered, “ much better than in the street.”

"You're clever at selling," she went on, and I could feel her studying me closely. "Will you have a drink?" she asked, and, nothing daunted, I accepted yet another port and further biscuits.

You never refuse anything when you are destitute. It is a mistake not to eat because you are not hungry. As a wise woman once observed to me, "You may want it later."

"I've been watching you," she went on, sipping her port, "and it occurs to me that we might do business together."

Here indeed was an adventure! I felt myself on the threshold of a great discovery. What sort of business could the lady of the plush coat have with me?

"You might sell on commission. I'd offer you quite good terms, and you'd find a ready market for the goods."

She produced a brown paper parcel and showed me a collection of cigarette cases, match-boxes, pencil cases, all of them very neatly made in attractive-looking metal, brightly burnished. I discovered that this class of goods, made in Germany, can be bought wholesale at a very low figure.

"I'll give you twenty-five per cent. commission on everything you sell according to my listed price, and fifty per cent. of all that you get over. You ought to get a good deal over," she added, "as I say, you can sell well."

I did a rapid mental calculation, and discovered that twenty-five per cent. meant threepence in the shilling. Most of the articles were marked at one and three to one and six, with sixpence for the pencil cases. With any degree of good fortune I ought to make more at this than at matches.

"It won't be any good for you to offer these in the street, my dear; you'll have to try public houses, and I can't give you any tips what to do; you seem to have got the tricks of the trade already. You haven't been at the business long," she added.

"Not very," I answered, but I didn't tell her anything more, and she didn't ask me.

"Meet me to-morrow, outside here at half-past one, and I'll give you a consignment of goods. If I'm not outside, look for me in the bar."

I stared at her, a little astonished. "Will you want any deposit?" I asked.

"Oh no," she said. "I don't do business that way. I chance my luck—and it rarely fails me."

Subsequently that woman handed over to my care a good few shillings worth of value. And she did not know me from Adam, and quite probably I might have come straight from gaol. But the homeless have their own fashion of determining who can and who can not be trusted. The lady of the plush

coat had reckoned me up, and decided I was on the right side. Up to this point—though her appearance was anything but prosperous—I had decided that she was a person with a habitation, if only a top back room. The goods she carried about with her were worth ten shillings, and the fact that she was able to buy drinks without showing any anxiety, seemed to suggest she was used to, at any rate, small means. I still think my impression of her was correct ; but it came out that she had no habitation, not even the poorest apology for a home. She turned to me quite casually and asked where I was going to sleep that night ?

“ I don't know,” I said. “ I have some idea of going up to Camden Town.”

“ There's no need to spend all that money,” she protested. “ Come with me, and I'll get you put up for a few pence. I know a place where they charge fourpence, but as you're a friend of mine they will take you for half.”

It didn't sound alluring, but I refused to be faint-hearted. I was going to follow the stream and chance where it took me, even though it found its way into strange places. I told her I was much obliged, and would willingly go with her, and after a little more chat we left the bar and made our way across Piccadilly Circus, down the Embankment and across Waterloo Bridge.

She did not speak all the way. The habit of walking engenders silence; you get half doped with the unceasing exercise and have little energy for speech. I was frankly curious as to my companion's history. But I never learned very much about her. She must have made enough to keep herself by selling her goods, but she belonged to no type of outcast in any settled place.

Some few are born like that—the inheritance, perhaps, of some far off gypsy blood—others acquire the fear of four walls and a roof, and no amount of suffering can dissipate it. My friend, I think, belonged to the latter category. I fancy that she must have spent some time in prison, for she had the habit of looking behind her with a sudden, furtive movement as though she expected the hand of the law to close upon her arm. There was also another reason for this apprehension. As I found later, she took drugs, and it may be that she added to her earnings by the sale of dope. It was a curious experience, that walk. I was sensitive to the atmosphere of mystery which surrounded her, and though we did not talk, we were not conscious of our silence.

She was obviously a woman of good mentality. Her speech was smooth, and her accent had a touch of distinction. I often look for my friend of the plush coat in or around Shaftesbury Avenue when I re-visit

the scenes of my adventures, but I have never caught a glimpse of her. Nor is this strange. Like moves to like, outcast gravitates to outcast, and until once more I strip myself of my comfortable home, and step across the boundary which divides security from starvation, I shall not look on her again.

We crossed Waterloo Bridge and turned towards the New Cut. I always feel a curious spiritual depression when I am on the south side of the river. Progress a little farther and the raucous vulgarity of Brixton, the muffled seriousness of Streatham, make their own atmosphere, but the immediate effect when you cross any of the bridges is as potent as anything you can experience in Bethnal Green or in Haggerston, that place of the distressed.

My spirits were not enlivened when we turned the corner of a narrow and evil-smelling alley. I kept close to my guide; for a moment my heart failed me, and I had a terrible temptation to run away. It was not so much the darkness, the feeling that the alley was ill-lit or even the sound of furtive feet that flitted about us; it was the close and heavy smell that emerged from the open doorways; that strong, sickly, acrid odour that emanates from humanity packed tightly close. It came with a big blast, that odour, when at last we stopped at an open door, and my guide knocked three times.

An old woman, with whom my companion exchanged a few words, shuffled along the passage. She bade me hand over twopence, and I followed her into a low-ceilinged room, dirty and dingy, and crowded with women, old, elderly and middle-aged, with one or two young things as the exception. A coke fire burnt in the grate, and the air was warm and horribly close. The kitchen at Kennedy Court was a palace compared to it; the benches were broken down, and many of the women sat on the floor, clasping evil-smelling bundles.

Here were no prostitutes, no office cleaners. The women were street vendors in the poorer parts; for in this walk of life, as in others, there are lights and shades among the ragged and forlorn, and few of the lodgers gathered together could have appeared at Piccadilly Circus or in Shaftesbury Avenue without being run in. There was one flower woman, young, among them. She did not belong to the noble army of flower girls with their admirable organisation and sturdy trade union principles. She had no recognised pitch, but made her pence by appeal to the charitable, who, judging by her nungry look, did not whole-heartedly respond. Like the rest, her feet were tragically ill-shod, in large and shapeless boots, originally meant for a man, held together by string instead of laces, with a hiatus between the upper and

the sole, through which there showed a grimy foot. She wore one of those strange garments that go by the name of ulster. I never yet discovered a new ulster; they appear to come into the world in a state of malnutrition and decay.

Some "lodgers" wore wisps of sad-looking fur—"perfectly good mog," as a cheery match-seller described it. I don't know the origin of the name, but to me, it is an admirable synonym for an article of adornment highly cherished by the most destitute among my sex.

Apart from the flower-seller and a consumptive-looking girl who worked in a slop shop, *i.e.*, a cheap tailor's, my fellow lodgers were seasoned veterans. A few took off their hats, if you can so describe the battered objects perched on their matted hair, the rest retained them closely, fearful, I suppose, of losing a vital part of their possessions. Their faces were not clean, though I am sure before their mode of life shifted their perspective, they would have welcomed a wash.

There was very little chatter. Mostly they sat quiet, in an apathy of rest. Not that their faces expressed vacancy, but their minds were elsewhere. As I discovered, the eternal walking about erects a barrier between you and material things, and it is only the sharper and more primal needs of the body which arouse the active consciousness. My

friend of the plush coat had disappeared, and presently I felt I would like to follow her. The lack of air, the smouldering smell of stale humanity affected me with a physical nausea, the like of which I had not before known.

I found the decrepit female in the passage outside—I could write a whole chapter on the psychology of these aged doorkeepers—and asked her for a bed. She pointed up a rickety flight of stairs lit by a faint gas-burner. The walls, originally painted brown, were black with age; the window on the landing, draped with torn curtains of Nottingham lace, had not been cleaned for generations. Up yet another flight, across a creaking landing, and into a large room filled with truckle beds.

The air was impossible. I tried the next room on the same floor. It was smaller, and the window was open at the top. There was a vacant bed just underneath it, and, thankful at the chance of better atmosphere, I decided it should be mine.

I did not dare to look at the sheets, I felt somehow they were alive; indeed, it needed a very definite act of will before I could induce myself to take off my raincoat and my costume. I put on my nightdress over the rest of my clothes, hoping they would serve as protection against the invading army of insects which I was sure lurked in

the sodden palliasses and unsavoury blankets. This, however, was an affliction from which I was spared. Generally speaking, your lodging house and doss house is free from lice. The lodgers, many of them, are fruitfully verminous, but the strays, which they leave behind them, are dealt with according to those preparations discovered during the war, so that though the shake-downs in Waterloo Bridge Road are horribly dirty, they are free from vermin, being daily sprayed with strong chemicals.

This I did not know until the next morning, and apprehension of crawlers and an uncanny sense of spiritual discomfort kept me awake. Now the senses of the outcast, as I discovered, grow preternaturally acute, and though I had been on the streets only a few days, I had already learned to feel not only the approach of physical danger, but the proximity of evil. I felt evil was near me, moving towards me from the nearest bed. There was no light in the room, only the pale sinister grey of the South London sky, which seemed to distort the features of the face on the flock pillow next to mine into something almost inhuman.

I did not feel drowsy, but if slumber had approached me I must have fought it off. I had put my bag with my day's takings under the pillow, and I clasped it quickly as I lay, uncomfortable in mind, body and

estate. Bad nights, however, were telling on me, and towards dawn I suppose I must have dropped off. I do not think I can have slept more than a few minutes, for I awoke with a start, my heart thumping, as it always does in moments of stress. The bed next to me was empty, and—I knew it—I felt it—my bag had gone . . .

Now an unfamiliar sensation, something you have never quite experienced before is a psychological landmark. When I sat up and realised that the whole of my day's takings, the money that I had so proudly earned by the sale of matches, plus the development of a special technique, had left me, I was gripped by actual terror. Not physical terror, which we must all of us have known, but a terror of the future, the material future that never before had touched me. I suppose the life I had been leading, one of hand-to-mouth destitution, had tangibly affected me, for I forget that behind all the hunger and anxiety my own home was waiting for me, and remembered only that I had to begin that day without a penny, and that before nightfall I must get a bed or walk the streets.

The terror slipped like a shadow when I got out of bed, and I became very angry. I could have forgiven the woman if she had taken half or nearly all the money; she might have left me the price of a cup of tea—

and she should not have taken my bag. I dressed myself with furious haste, and went in search of my friend of the night before. Emotion always changes one's perspective, and whereas the previous evening I shrank from inspecting the large room next to where I had passed the night, that morning I marched in, indifferent to the smells, the suffocating reek which met me, and peered at every truckle bed in turn, until I found my lady embedded in her black plush coat.

She was past all rousing. Heavily drugged, she had gone over the border line to the world of the imagination, and the house might have been afire, or murder committed straight in front of her, and she would not have known. I left her, and made my way back through the room, across the landing, down the flight of rickety stairs, and so out into the alley.

Some of the lodgers were already astir, searching among strange and unsavoury bundles in the dim light. Unlike Kennedy Court, most of the sojourners brought their bundles, which seemed to consist very largely of horrid looking skins—"mog," I suppose, in process of transfiguration to a higher plane. The skins of rabbit, cat and even dog, looked creepy, and I suspected insects and hurried past, with fearful feet.

It was a relief to be back in the open air

once more, though the alley was by no means fragrant, forlorn and dilapidated dustbins obtruded their unseemly presence on the path side. I walked off my anger along the Waterloo Bridge Road, and so over the bridge and along the Strand. By this time the business of the day was astir, and over the bridges were coming those fragile, pretty creatures that London breeds by hundreds, nay, thousands; delicate daughters of the suburbs on the way to those offices where, victims of a white slave traffic in the commercial sense, they tap typewriters for seven or eight hours a day.

I walked leisurely up to Holborn, and then, suddenly, just after nine o'clock, a rage of hunger fell upon me. I was gripped by the desire for food so fiercely that I felt I must scream in anger that I was baulked of a meal. Then I understood how it happened that starving women and men should suddenly break windows and throw stones. It is the result of an extreme want of nourishment, an active and impelling craving for hot drink, fresh bread and, if you are driven to the last ditch, roast meat. Think of the whole universe resolving itself into an anguished frenzy for a mutton chop, fried bacon and a poached egg! Think of wanting to eat so much that you could almost barter your most cherished recollections; your love of literature, the swing of those stately

phrases which march through the mind like a triumphant army—for food !

A curious state—when the sheer force of an ill-fed body masters the mind and, like a savage, makes you run amuck. But it is something to have experienced such a moment. It is something to know why it is that women suddenly destroy the nearest thing to hand. I ask you to leave your comfortable beds, your well-spread tables, and live among the destitute, and you also will feel an overwhelming impulse to break windows or beat your hands against the stones.

I did not do either of these things, though I wanted to. But I determined, however I got it, I would have breakfast. I stood at the top of Southampton Row, and eyed the men on their way to their business. And then I selected a well-dressed individual about forty, with shrewd eyes and a certain humorous twist of the mouth. He wasn't a literary man, I knew that, nor was he in commerce. I judged him to be a barrister, and I went straight up and opened my case.

“ You've got a lot of money,” I said, brightly.

He stopped, as I knew he would stop, curious to see what would happen.

“ Well,” he said, “ what about it, if I have ? ”

“ I want some breakfast,” I said calmly.

"Tell me why I should buy you any?"

"Because I have brains," I said, desperately. The imaginary odour of frizzled bacon fired my will.

"If you have brains," he answered, "use them to get some breakfast with."

"I have," I retorted, quickly. "I have chosen you."

And at that he smiled, and then began to laugh, and I knew the day was won. For a man may resist tears, harden his heart to importunity, turn aside invective, but there is no son of Adam, who, can deny a woman when she makes him laugh.

He surrendered at discretion, took me to the nearest tea shop and ordered bacon, eggs, toast and hot coffee. We talked over the meal, and I told him how hard I found it to get regular employment without a reference. He brushed that aside, but was quite interested when I explained the psychology of selling matches. He gave me a shilling as we parted, and I somehow felt it due to him that I should make another attempt to get engaged as a cook. I went to the Holborn Public Library and studied the advertisement column, and found that a cook, "good plain," was wanted in Kensington. I spent some of my few pence on the fare, and called at a house near the High Street. There was nothing doing. The fatal lack of character stood like a flaming sword between me and

security. I fought pretty hard, and offered to come for a day on trial, but the suggestion was received coldly. I had wanted to prove that a woman without a reference cannot get employment in a recognised vocation; and prove it I did. I went from that house resolved to waste no more time or effort in chasing a job, but to concentrate on the sale of cigarette cases, etc., on commission.

I felt obliged to treat myself to a wash, and by the time I had walked back to town it was just on the hour when I was to meet the lady of the black plush coat. Alas! she was not at the appointed place. I stood outside the friendly public house and waited for her wistfully. I opened the door and gazed hungrily inside. She was not there, and by closing time I had given up all hope of seeing her again. I spent my remaining coppers in matches, keeping a penny in reserve, but I had no luck. The afternoon is always bad for the match trade; it is the time when women do their shopping, and as I have said they are not profitable customers to street sellers. Moreover, I felt depressed, and despondency minimises your chances of a sale, so I did the only possible thing, I went and sat in the Park.

I did not often go to the Park in those hours when I had come to the end of my tether. You feel so acutely conscious of the gulf that cuts you off from social inter-

course. I preferred to go to the British Museum and gaze at Rameses. The contemplation of that immeasurable aloofness has always given me rest and comfort. I have visited Rameses in many moments of poignant distress, and so it seemed natural to go to him when for the first time in my life I wanted food.

The material needs of life were becoming very much of an obsession. I realised with a start that I was no longer eager for the newspapers; I did not even trouble to look at the placards. Your vitality, unreplenished by comfortable food and sleep, instinctively fastens on those things that are essential to the maintenance of life. This is why your outcasts often appear stupid, stolid, almost mentally deficient. They know nothing of the affairs of the political or the literary world, they are unthrilled by the falling of dynasties, or the discovery of a planet. The avenues of interest open to the well-fed are closed to them, they are haunted always by the spectres, hunger and sleeplessness. For them so cruelly often there is only the street for a bed.

CHAPTER VII

KNOCKING AT THE GATE

IT is confidently assumed that the doss house is extinct. The Public Lodging House for women, licensed by the London County Council, is supposed to have taken its place. This is not so. There are doss houses in all the poorer quarters of London, though they are more numerous on the south side of the river and in the East End than in other districts. The class of lodger who uses this kind of place for a night's shelter is lower in the social scale than the women who frequent the lodging houses. There is, of course, the great economic difference between those who can pay one shilling and twopence, and those who can only rise to fourpence and, in some cases, threepence. As I explained, my first experience only cost me twopence, owing to the intervention of the lady in the plush coat. The general tariff is fourpence, and the accommodation is not so vastly inferior to those places which are supposed to be inspected by the L.C.C. and are permitted—so far as the beds are concerned—to flourish in undiminished dirt.

The doss houses are owned by individual proprietors, though I gather that there has arisen in this, as in other industries, a syndicate. The manageress, if she may be so called, is an employee at a small salary, and in certain instances, receives a commission on the takings. There is also frequently, a man on the premises in case of a disturbance. Usually, the outcasts who frequent the doss house are not quarrelsome—they have not the energy; but cases have been known of a free fight, invariably terminated by the arrival of the man in charge who bundles the combatants out of the house. The floors are dirty, the bed clothes are of that uniform drab-grey which harbours dirt without exposing it. It is a dreadful colour, and always you feel that underneath the surface there must lurk thousands of germs, noxious bacilli and, very often, lice and bugs.

Bugs I met with, lice I did not encounter, generally speaking. This is, I think, a very definite alteration in the underworld of London. Not so many years ago, lice were rampant in many quarters, but, as I have said, the use of chemicals keeps them down, for which relief I give much thanks.

The people who use this kind of shelter are personally very dirty. They rarely have any opportunity of changing their clothes. They have lost that zest for personal daintiness so conspicuous at Kennedy Court, where the

poorest little prostitute will wash her rags at every opportunity. Clean hands are not the rule in these particular sections, and many of the women are perennially verminous, so far as their hair is concerned. The strange thing is that, no matter how infected, they will not have it cut. It is not a question of shame; it is not a desire to escape criticism, for they could quite easily cut their hair themselves, nor is there any occasion to seek an official. But cut their hair they will not and masses of unkempt locks are wound round the head, literally alive with insects.

It is, I think, a feeling that long hair is the last touch of feminine attraction that life has left them. Possibly they feel that a cropped head would unsex them. They never express irritation at their uncomfortable condition—they regard it, very largely, as an act of God, and day after day carry their load of dirt and misery without the faintest hope of any relief.

So keen is their resolve not to have their hair cut off that when, as sometimes happens, they are forced into the casual wards through sheer inability to walk, they will come out in the middle of the night rather than agree to have their heads attended to.

Next to the question of hair the matter of feet is the most crucial. Boots are an insoluble problem, for they are always worn out. The most shapeless and terrible apolo-

gies for shoes are met with in the doss houses and the street, broken in the soles, bursting out at the sides, with huge cracks across the instep that chafe the skin and set up running sores. The cheapest pair of the most second-hand kind is beyond the means of this type of outcast to purchase, for, as the external condition deteriorates, so the earning capacity dwindles, and the danger of being arrested as a beggar increases. Many of them replenish their footwear from the scourings of dust bins. In the early morning you will often find a furtive figure turning over the refuse of the roadside. Crusts of bread are taken, and all kinds of garbage ; but the treasure trove is a shoe, and if a pair is salved from the wreckage, physical contentment is assured.

The feet of the woman tramp, or street vendor—it is the same thing—are very pitiful to see. They are almost non-human in their shapelessness. Callosities, horny growths, bunions, destroy their contours, running sores are perennial and the efforts of Nature to escape the pain of contact with rough leather, result in distortion of the bone. Ingrowing nails are common ; how should it be otherwise ? The care of the feet calls for plentiful hot water and requisite toilet accessories ; and these women, of whom I write, have not the means to wash their sores. There is, of course, due bathing accommodation in the casual ward of a workhouse, but as I shall

show, the thing that survives longest and most fiercely among the destitute, is a passionate fear of restriction, the horror of detention within four walls, under a strange roof. For this reason before they will ask a night's lodging of the Poor Law Guardians they will push endurance to an inhuman limit.

This is especially the case with the outcasts of the London streets. These women who have taken to the road and go out into the country have accustomed themselves to the casual ward, have assimilated every twist and turn of the law, and know to a nicety what they must do, and what the master has not the power to enforce.

There are some doss houses which are licensed by the L.C.C. Of these the Salvation Army Shelter in Hanbury Street, White-chapel, is the largest. There for the sum of fivpence an outcast, however dilapidated, dirty, starving, or afflicted, can get a clean, warm bed. My night in Hanbury Street was one of the most poignant experiences of my adventures, and I shall deal with it at length later on. At the moment I am concerned to show how and where the outcasts sleep when they have sunk below the economic level of the licensed lodging house.

For those who have no money, not even a copper, there remains St. Crispin's Dormitories. This Shelter, in the neighbourhood of

Spitalfields, is run by charitable Catholics. The accommodation of necessity is frugal. A number of boxes run the length of the room, each box is provided with a mattress, pillow and blanket, and to obtain a box, women will walk for miles and queue up early in the evening. Here there is considerable difficulty in keeping the place free from vermin, for very many of the lodgers have that long, matted hair which I have already described. St. Crispin's is open from October to May. During the summer months it shuts down, for when the weather is warm a night on the Embankment or in one of the many open spaces of London is not insufferable. It is when the world is freezing and the wind cuts to your very soul that you cry out blindly for a bed. At such a time a dog kennel would seem hospitable: and yet all through the winter months hundreds of outcast women spend the night huddled in doorways, under arches, or keep themselves from freezing by that everlasting walking about.

The accommodation offered to women by the Metropolitan Board of Guardians is extremely limited. In the whole of London—North, South, East and West—there is but one casual ward where the destitute female can find a bed. The reasons for this limitation are interesting. Since the War, women's casual wards have been handed over to the other sex. Paddington was a last female

trench ; now this has gone, and only Southwark remains. It follows, therefore, that to get a bed you must often—indeed, most frequently—traverse the length and breadth of London. For how shall it profit the outcasts at Highgate to know that on the other side of Lambeth Bridge a cubicle awaits them ?

This male invasion of casual wards, intended for women, is an outcome of the fear of the authorities that an ex-service man should be discovered bedless and starving in the streets. This would arouse a very general indignation, and a steady fire of middle class criticism would be directed against the powers that be ; it is the middle class, far more than the Socialist or Communist groups, that authority always fears. Were a man, who had fought in his country's cause, found on the Embankment in the last stage of exhaustion, letters to the Press would rain down from all parts, the whole question of unemployment would be raised, and the old taunt of ingratitude flung in the teeth of the particular Cabinet responsible at the time.

There have been very few cases reported of ex-soldiers and sailors driven to the last gasp of endurance ; and in order to prevent, so far as possible, such a contingency, the women's wards of the workhouses have been taken from them. I want to make it perfectly plain that I, for one, would not take any beds from the men who fought for England. But

why should the women, wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts, of those same heroes be flung into the street in order to save the authorities from well-merited attack? The plea, that an old soldier must not starve, does not and cannot justify the callous indifference shown to a woman homeless and hungry.

There is no question of charity involved in the matter of the casual ward. The workhouse is kept up out of the rates, and every citizen, male and female, has a right to claim the shelter thus provided. But because no one cares what happens to the woman who is down and out, because no one troubles to enquire if she has a place wherein to lay her head, she is deliberately and specifically thrown to the dogs, that Cabinet Ministers may escape a whipping.

This is not the only penalty exacted from my sex. The men in the casual ward have hot tea every morning; the women have the dregs of their teapots an hour later. This, at least, was the state of things at Southwark Workhouse where I spent a night in the casual ward. Following on my revelation of this cruel custom in a Sunday newspaper, the Board of Guardians gave instructions that Southwark should be provided with a gas stove whereon an urn could sit, in which the tea could be kept hot.

As well as the superior accommodation of male public lodging houses, and the unfair

division of the casual wards, the authorities rightly afford opportunity for an out-of-work, or a destitute man to make good. The master of every workhouse is instructed particularly to note those male casuals who have been in the Army or the Navy ; those with any trace of education ; those who have average abilities. These men when they leave the ward are given an order of admission to a hostel in Holborn, where they stay, free of charge, for a week. The conditions of life there are quite human ; they have good food, decent beds, rooms for recreation and free tobacco. I cannot speak too highly of the arrangements ; they provide a man with a chance to regain the footing he has lost. During the week's stay all efforts are made to find him a job, and he is allowed to come and go in his search for employment without let or hindrance. Wise provision, admirable organisation ! For the sake of the men who have endured something of what I and my sisters have passed through, I am thankful beyond words that such a place exists.

But why, because an outcast is a woman, should she be debarred from opportunity to make a living ? Any one of the women with whom I came in contact—I do not include the little prostitutes—provided with a week's respite, in decent conditions, afforded the opportunity to wash their rags, to mend their clothes and regain something of the human

attributes of their beginnings, would emerge a different creature. But no ! it does not matter what happens to the woman derelict ; the policy seems to be that the sooner she dies of starvation and exposure the better for society.

There is no need, human or economic, to salve her. She is of no account. But save the man ! Use the casual wards. Inspect the lodging houses. Throw open the kindly doors of a comfortably equipped hostel, and the Government shall escape the castigation they so merit. Apart from the Salvation Army, and one or two other bodies, the woman outcast in the London streets to-day is as derelict as the woman of Hood's great lines.

Apart from political considerations there is, I think, a psychological explanation that the spectacle of a man out of work, feeling the humiliation which is the inevitable accompaniment of dependence, arouses not only commiseration, but indignation in the minds of the majority of women. Something, they feel, must be wrong with society, otherwise why should a decent, good-looking, well-spoken fellow be obliged, if not to beg, to do something very like it ? But let a vagrant of the female sex come to the door, and, generally speaking, she creates a feeling of distrust, if not hostility. Dirt, in a man, not infrequently suggests romance—in a woman it implies degradation, neglect and an obstinate

refusal to undertake the obligations of her sex.

No housewife of the well-kept home feels comfortable with an unkempt creature in the vicinity. "Get rid of her" is the usual instruction and irritable desire, generally coupled, I admit, with an instruction to hand out a piece of bread—never, I swear, with that additional butter which makes it fit for human consumption. Oh! the difference between bread and bread-and-butter! If it were only possible for those people who never have to worry about their next meal to know the bitter taste of dry bread. Margarine, that substitute for generosity, beloved of the meagre, raises false hopes. How eagerly you take the first bite, with what satisfaction you proceed to masticate, and then—that sickly, salty, rancid flavour overcomes you and in a violent physical revulsion you spit it out. There are brands of margarine which pass muster on the palate; but these are not for the delectation of the outcast. Poverty is their crime, and the punishment is unremitting. I have broken into this dissertation, because I am tired of hearing good and comfortable women complain of the wicked waste of good victuals bestowed at their back door. Tales have been told me of hungry beggars who cast slices of the best household in the gutter just outside. Judicious enquiry has generally uncovered the fact that the bread was very

stale, and to make a meal on stale bread, unmoistened, is a physical impossibility, as I myself can testify. It is quite useless to say to the good and virtuous "Give money." The answer is "They will spend it in drink"—a wise provision of nature mercifully ordained for the comfort of the stomach. For when your energy is gone and you are vitiated and trembling, your digestion will not assimilate cold bread, but will respond immediately to the tonic of a glass of beer, or a cup of hot coffee. Wherefore, so say all outcasts, blessed be she who dispenses coppers instead of broken meat. Though a nicely cut sandwich, such as you would eat yourself, does not come amiss.

But such is not the luck of woman. Too often she is regarded as a perambulatory dust bin, and packets of bread the worse for wear, mouldy potatoes, cheese rinds, are thrust upon her, thus clearing the pantry and poulticing the faint sense of reproach that sometimes attacks the amply nurtured. But make no mistake; those cruelly deceptive packages, unacceptable to man or beast, only serve to dishearten. I can imagine no greater nor more cruel disappointment, than awaits the poor woman who undoes the brown paper and white string so thoughtfully provided by the villa resident, only to discover the spring cleanings of the larder.

It is not for food alone that the outcast

comes to the back door. There is always the lingering hope that a pair of boots may come her way. But since the war, such gifts are very rare and very precious, and indeed as a fellow outcast, some fifteen years upon the road, assured me, it is but seldom nowadays that you get so much as an old skirt.

Country houses are far more responsive in this respect than London. Probably the tradition of a large hearted hospitality still lingers, and the old commandment of the Middle Ages that none should be sent empty away may yet hold good. At any rate, I know that some of my outcast friends possess not only boots, but comfortable waterproofs and well-worn tweeds, and, as they have told me, there are places where they make a call each month or six weeks, and always there is a pile of garments waiting for them. It is interesting to note that when an outcast does obtain a decent garment she does not, as is popularly supposed, hurry to the pawnshop to raise the price of a pint of beer. For, I say again, beer plays a very small part in the life of the down-and-out, and once having got a garment able to resist the wind and weather, she will cling to the same until its final dissolution or her extreme need.

There is a nice legal point in relation to this collecting of clothes. He or she who goes to a house and asks for food or raiment is held guilty of begging and may be given in charge.

But, so says the law, you may call at any house and offer to sell matches, or pins, or hairpins, or some other unimportant trifle, and there is nothing against the suggestion that the wares may be exchanged for the cast-offs of the wardrobe. Thus are the police placated and the liberty of the individual secured. Only in one case may proffered sale be omitted. You may call at any religious institution and ask for food without fear of the courts, even under the very shadow of a constable.

A dear old tramp of my acquaintance indulges in this exercise as a form of sport and greatly delights to ring the bell of a certain Nazareth House with the appraising eye of a policeman upon her. Women do not, as a rule, offer plants in exchange for clothes. That is a branch of industry reserved for men. Nor is this to be wondered at. The enthusiastic young wife who joyfully surrenders her husband's favourite jacket for an aspidistra, at the persuasion of a man, would indignantly refuse a similar proposal from a member of her own sex. She would, indeed, immediately credit the woman with sinister designs. What should she do with a jacket? While the bare notion that any of her pretty garments should go to the clothing of the vagrant would be so distasteful as to induce the abrupt closing of the door. It may be that better luck attends the outcast at the country house because

there we still find the male retainer. Even in moderate mansions or dwellings of still lesser calibre, something like a butler, a footman or a tweeny man, is yet to be found, and the immutable law of sex decrees that the most battered specimen of femininity will find a readier sympathy in the bosom of a man than from a more blooming specimen of womanhood.

This then, seems to me, an additional reason why the case of the outcast woman should be dealt with justly. Most of these street wanderers have been wives, many of them have been mothers, and for this reason alone their cry should appeal to the heart of man.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AWFUL BUSINESS OF THE DOOR-HANDLE

I FIRST went to the casual ward under very melancholy conditions. I was dispirited to find that my entry into commerce had been postponed. I had high hopes as to what I should achieve in the sale of cigarette cases, etc., on commission. But my friend of the plush coat did not turn up. I went to the public-house again that evening, but she was not there. My low spirits were reflected in my trade—I could not get my matches off, and no one would give me more than two-pence. I watched the outside of that public house with a sinking heart. I had two coppers on me after a purchase of a cup of tea and a miserable bun, and there was no means by which I could raise any more. My only chance of escaping an unpleasant experience was to go home. But that would have been to confess failure, and when it comes to the fundamentals of life I always develop a certain sticking power. I decided to see this experience through.

The wind had fallen, and a peculiarly unpleasant sleet was coming down, stinging

your face and creeping down between the collar of your coat and your neck. I felt as if I had been an outcast for years and I had to take myself in hand pretty thoroughly before I found courage to speak to a policeman.

The outward and visible signs of my destitution were very plain that evening. Unconsciously I had acquired the slinking gait which comes of glancing furtively behind to see if you are being followed by some prosperous citizen with an eye to complaint. It was difficult to hold up my head, my shoulders drooped wearily. I wished very much that I was coward enough to go back to my bed. But I knew that such a course would cut me off from the knowledge I was so desperately eager to gain. To understand how an outcast feels, you yourself must be outcast.

"Where is the nearest casual ward, please?" I asked a young policeman.

"There's only one for women, and that's in Great Guildford Street, Southwark. You'd best go over Westminster Bridge and then enquire your way."

I followed his directions and, much buffeted by cold and rain, found myself in the Kennington Road. I was directed to a workhouse near Lambeth Walk, where I interviewed the porter. He explained that his establishment was for men only, but that he would give me an order which would admit me to Southwark.

Furthermore, he handed me a red counter, marked with the mystic figure ONE.

"If you give this to the tram conductor, he'll give you a ticket," he explained.

"What shall I have to do at the Workhouse?" I asked, rather frightened.

"Oh, nothing very terrible, my dear," was the cheery reply. "They'll take your money away till the morning, that is, if you have any. You can't go in with more than a shilling, you know."

My resources, I explained, were twopence, and I got into the tram, feeling as though the eyes of all the world were on me.

"Fares, please," said the conductor, and then I surprised myself.

Something in me asserted itself, and I leaned forward in my best social manner, in marked contrast to my dilapidated clothes, and handed the conductor the counter.

"Stop outside the casual ward, if you please," I said.

The woman next to me edged farther along the seat, but none of the others took any notice. The conductor beamed at me genially, answered "Certainly, Miss," and gave me a ticket.

I was awfully glad he called me "Miss," because it seemed to show that those other outcasts who had handed him their counters had been treated just as nicely.

He stopped at the nearest point to the

House and wished me good luck very cheerily. I found the entrance to the casual ward with difficulty—the walls seemed very high and the night was dark. When, at last, I unearthed the bell, the long clanging peal was ominous. Automatically the door opened, and the porter told me to come inside.

He was a nice looking young man with bright eyes and a great sense of humour.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

The inevitable “Annie Turner” duly came forth.

“Where were you born?”

The question seemed to me ridiculous.

“I don’t know,” I answered.

“Now, that’s a pity,” said the porter.

“Where did you go to school?”

“Manchester,” I said, lying boldly.

Age came next, colour of eyes and hair, and then—“What’s your height?”

“Now why on earth,” said I, “do you want to know that for?”

The porter bent towards me confidentially. “The Minister of Health’s very interested in your height,” said he. Whereat I determined that the Minister of Health should be fully satisfied.

Now I have always wished to be a tall woman and Fate having brought me the opportunity I gave myself five foot nine inches, which the porter, highly amused, duly entered up.

"Now you go on upstairs," said he, "and the female attendants will look after you."

It has been said that this particular porter is cross-tempered—some of my fellow casuals have whispered it with bated breath. For this reason, I should like to say, he is one of the nicest people I have ever met and I hope in a future life he will be attendant to St. Peter.

I was received by a young woman seated at a table, who put me through the identical catechism framed by the porter. These preliminaries over, she explained, quite nicely, the position of the woman admitted to the casual ward.

"This place," she said, "as you know, is run by rules decided by the authorities. They are not made by us, but we are responsible that they are carried through. I hope you will see your way to conform to them."

This reception, I admit, was a great surprise. I had thought to find Bumble rampant. I had expected to be treated with ignominy, if not with derision. I found nothing of either. The attitude of all the officials with whom I came in contact was quite human. There was nothing in their manner that could possibly affront that fundamental dignity born in the meanest of mankind. I was destitute, but that did not impair my inalienable right to human treatment. Throughout

my stay I was never once made to feel I was a pauper.

"Have you any money?" asked the young woman.

I handed her my twopence and asked if I might keep my nightdress.

"We supply one," she answered. "I am sorry, but you must not take anything with you into the ward."

I solemnly handed over the contents of my packet, together with a dilapidated powder puff, the one thing that had not been taken from me in the doss house.

"If you have any private papers, or letters I will seal them in a packet and keep them for you until the morning. We have no desire to pry into your affairs; you understand that?"

I had not any papers, and I explained that I had spent the previous night in a doss house and should enjoy a hot bath immensely. She led the way into the bath room, and I had a hot tub, with decent soap and a good sized bath towel. The attendant watched me fairly closely.

"Why you're quite clean," she said, and seemed remarkably astonished. "It's such a relief," she continued, "to find someone who isn't dirty. By-the-bye, is your head all right?"

I bowed for her inspection, and my hair passed muster.

“ You’ve no idea what some of them are like, you know. We have women in here who are fairly alive.”

“ They can’t help it, really, can they ? ” I said protestingly. “ It’s difficult to find the money for a wash, let alone a bath.”

“ But it’s unfair to the others, all the same.” said the young woman, “ and the worst of it is some of them won’t let you touch their heads.”

It was not any good to argue the point, and her attitude is quite explicable. It is not a nice job to have to “ cleanse ” heads riddled with lice. As I have said a number of outcasts decline to let their hair be interfered with. A small percentage, however, yield to necessity and submit to treatment.

The particular official who is on duty has to tackle the proposition with results unpleasing to a sensitive stomach. Generally speaking, when the offending head is shaved, and excavations conducted under the scalp—for lice burrow deep—the patient is exhausted. For it is a strange thing that, deprived of this mass of obscene life, the body seems to grow weak, and frequently a day or two in bed in the infirmary is necessary to restore normal conditions. It may be that the unceasing irritation which would drive most people almost mad, serves as a kind of counterblast to the mental stress of seeking food and lodging. In other words, the ceaseless activity of the lice may prove an anodyne to the pangs

of starvation. Remove the artificial stimulus and collapse sets in.

I followed the bright-faced young woman along a bleak corridor, dressed in the work-house nightgown, a striped garment, fastening at the back, with long enveloping sleeves.

“Leave your clothes on the floor outside the door,” she said, “they’ll be inspected, and, if necessary—baked.”

This was a polite way of telling me that should my garments prove to be verminous they would be dealt with. There is always a hot chamber working in the House. Sometimes the clothes suffer as well as the insects, and the unfortunate casual gets back a singed skirt, or a scorched petticoat. I was put wise as to this by a wonderful woman, by name Kitty Grimshaw, one of the finest characters on the road.

“If they burns your clothes, me dear,” she said, “they’re bound to make ’em good, the law says so, and I stands by the law.”

There is nothing indeed about the law as it applies to the Workhouse that Kitty does not know. She is like one of those old soldiers, who have mastered King’s Regulations so completely that they can trip up a superior officer at any minute.

“Law is law,” Kitty always says, “and don’t you forget to let the Master know you know it.”

I was given a mattress, a pillow and a pair

of blankets, and told to take them into my "cell"—word of ill omen. It sent a shudder through my body. I do not understand why the word "cell" is employed, unless it be that it is so exact a replica of the prison variety that even the official sense of humour would boggle at another name. Still, cubicle might be tried; it would not have so ominous a suggestion.

I was left in the darkness very much alone. I had been oppressed with the sense of sleeping humanity the previous night; I had been surrounded by an atmosphere that would not let me rest; but in the terrible isolation of my cell, my soul ached for the company of the women with their unspeakable bundles, their rabbit skins, their "mog."

High up in the wall was a tiny, round window, like a port-hole, far beyond my power to reach. There was a little observation shutter in the door; now and again it was lifted and the light from the corridor outside peeped in.

The mattress was not too hard, the blankets soft and warm, but the pillow was as stiff as a log of wood. It is as though the Guardians feel the casual must not have comfort everywhere. This policy is part of the determination to prevent a return visit. Thus, you may stretch your limbs, hug your arms under soft fleecy wool, but your head shall find no ease. To and fro—to and fro, you turn on that torturous pillow.

The "cell," slightly funnel-shape, is like a coffin, as it suddenly occurred to me. I felt myself entombed in an instant, cut off for ever from the light of day. I wanted to scream—a sob choked my throat—I was getting hysterical—and I knew it. And over and above all this quaking of the flesh, and shrinking of the spirit, was another and more dreadful piece of knowledge. I knew that if I tried the handle of the door it would not open. *No handle was there.* I could not escape from my funnel-shaped coffin, I might beat my hands upon the wall, but I could not get free.

I felt that if I went to the door and ratified my instinctive suspicion I should be unable to control myself. So I kept quiet and would not go to see what I feared was true. But in the grey dawning when I was quieter—though I had not slept—I crept out and went towards the door. And it was even as I had thought.

Some months ago there was a case in the police court, where it was alleged an inmate of a casual ward was "locked" in her cell. The superintendent stated upon oath that this was not so. "There are," he said, "no keys."

I know of no better example of the letter of the truth—and the violation of the spirit. There are no keys, but, as I have said, when the casual is duly in bed, the handle of the door is withdrawn.

The official explanation of this device would

appear quite reasonable. It is said that if people could open their doors and come out of their cells, they would visit each other all night. One or two convivial spirits might, perhaps, drift into the corridor, but for the most part the casual is so dog-tired that any such spirit of enterprise is knocked out. But even were every casual to emerge, an attendant on night duty could shoo them back with the warning that if they came out again they would be shut in. It is as I have said, the Guardians do not desire to extend hospitality too often. Therefore, they inflict slight penalties upon the body and the soul, which, in the aggregate, make up a sum sufficiently imposing to make a night in the ward a thing most strenuously to be avoided.

I had always known that the Guardians deliberately adopt this régime, that their chief intent is to keep casuals "out," not to welcome them in. But to know a thing and to experience it is widely different. I wish some of the guardians could be "destitute" and try their own wards.

We were aroused the next morning about half-past five. The cell door was open. I found my clothes outside the door and put them on in the dim light. I could see other figures also putting on their clothes up and down the corridor. It was a queer experience. Things always seem fore-shortened in the half-light before the night is utterly faded away and

the morning come. When we were all dressed we folded up our blankets and carried them with pillow and mattress to the end of the corridor from whence they were despatched to be fumigated. Outside each door the number is painted in bold figures—a discovery which somehow made me feel more than ever like a convict. We were then shepherded into the day room, a mournful place with bare boards, whitewashed walls and a long trestled table. There was no fire in the grate. Large tin mugs full of what was supposed to be tea were placed on the table together with slices of bread spread with a particularly distasteful brand of “marge.”

After a bad night every woman aches for a cup of tea, and I do not think I ever felt more disappointed than when I found the liquid in the tin mugs to be loathsomely luke-warm. I could have cried at this uncalled-for rebuff. I was prepared for weak or unsweetened, but not cold tea. This piece of foolish unkindness, as I have said, is now remedied. The tea made for the men is poured off into an urn which sings merrily on a gas ring until required.

I tried to munch a piece of bread, but the marge was more than I could stomach, and feeling rather light in the head and unhappy about the heart, I sat on a form and observed my fellows.

The hour for leaving the House from the

casual ward is somewhere about half-past seven. A good few were going out that morning and I listened with interest to their plans. One woman, young and good looking, was anxiously asking how she could get from Southwark to Dulwich, because she had no knowledge of London and possessed but a few pence. She was an ironer by trade and should have had little difficulty in getting work. It was Kitty Grimshaw who told her what to do.

"Get the other side of Westminster Bridge, me girl," said she, "and ask a likely looking chap the nearest way. As like as not he'll give you a copper."

The young woman departed, and her place was taken by a gaunt female who came to the same fountain-head for information.

She wanted to know the best casual wards on the road to Tunbridge Wells, and once more the fine old Irishwoman came to the rescue. Kitty has a strong, handsome face. She is over sixty, but quite upright, with a wealth of greyish hair and quick, humorous eyes. She is a most efficient woman and, as she told me, can plant a field of potatoes with any man, and is first on the list for a number of fruit pickers. She is well-known at Southwark, where she returns every month or six weeks. She has been on the road for some eight years, driven there by that economic pressure which has deoused so many women.

She lived for some time in a room in Kennington, supporting herself by daily housework, with occasional incursions into a laundry.

“And then, me dear, they wanted me room, so they could get more rent—and somehowes they managed it and I’ve been on the road ever since. A fine, healthy life it is, and many’s the helping hand I get, though—” she glanced at her feet, “boots is me trouble. You’re new to the House, me dear,” she added, “but don’t you worry, I’ll put you right, so that you’ll know what to do when you come again.”

It was at this moment that a short, stugger little woman with a red face claimed attention. She was very agitated and most aggrieved. It seems that her vest, which had been fumigated with the rest of her clothes, was missing from her bundle, and leave the House without that vest she would not. The attendant on duty, a kindly young woman, of great humanity and understanding, had hunted for it up and down the corridor, but nowhere could it be found. Various women were interrogated but not a shadow of a vest was forthcoming. The red faced lady would not budge; the vest was her’s, and somehow or other it must be produced.

“And right you are,” said Kitty, “and isn’t it the law? They take your clothes and if they lose your clothes you’ve got to have the value, and haven’t I had many a fight

over the same thing and never have I been beaten.”

She tossed her head with its ample thatch, due, she assured me, to the constant use of vaseline—“ twopence the box and well worth the price.”

Under Kitty's behest a further, furious search was instigated, and at last the attendant, a little weary, brought back in triumph, the most begrimed thing in vests ever to be seen.

“ Here it is, Martha, and of all places in the world I found it in the men's room.” She looked at the red-faced woman. “ Have you been trying to get off ? ” she asked.

The sally was received with shouts of laughter. Such a little thing relieves the monotony in a casual ward ! Everyone is so pathetically eager to break through the cold officialdom, which, for all the kindness of the attendants—and I found them very kind—is always present.

Martha, being comforted, went on her way, and I found myself left with Kitty and a big battered woman of about fifty, and two others.

Like Sterne's starling, I was beginning to wish to get out. The walls seemed to be closing in on me. I got a little panic-stricken. Supposing this machine with which I had placed myself in contact should held me against my will ? Suppose they said that I

must stay. Guardians have such plenary powers to use against the poor. I saw myself sentenced to remain permanently in an institution, I remembered with quick alarm the "tests" by which they measure your intelligence. They might easily find me mentally deficient!

I went to the attendant and asked if I could go. It was then that the jaws of the trap began to close.

"You can't go until to-morrow morning," she said, "unless the superintendent gives you permission. According to law, you've got to give a day's work for your lodging. You are due to go out on Sunday."

"But—but I've got a chance of work. I may lose it if I'm kept here." Already I could detect it in my own voice that rising note that speaks a nervous excitation. I realised that if I did not keep cool I must arouse official antagonism. Emotional display is terribly contagious in any form of institutional life, and at the first sign the official mind takes fright and closes down on the unfortunate pleader.

"The superintendent will be up about ten," she said, "meanwhile you get on with some work."

She motioned me towards Kitty, and obediently I went and asked what I was to do. Kitty at that moment was cleaning the grate, heaving up great handfuls of ashes—they are not lavish with implements in the House—to

a running commentary on life in general and her own adventures in particular.

"There's nothing particular you can do," she answered, "just you *look* busy, that's what matters."

I found this to be the case. The tables had already been scrubbed; the corridor washed; there were only the brass knobs on the doors that awaited attention. I polished and re-polished with assiduity. But time hung heavy on my hands. A kindly attendant gave me the tip that the superintendent would not like to find me idle, so I traversed the corridor over and over again, loathing each separate handle, to which I applied Brasso with a new and instinctive dislike.

I think I must have looked not very well, for presently the battered woman—her name was Ellen—beckoned me mysteriously.

"Kitty's got some hot tea made for you, dear. I put it in your cell; drink it up, I'll see that nobody catches you."

To this hour I do not know what special pains and penalties were risked by Kitty and the kindly Ellen in the doing of this act of mercy. But whatever punishment they might have incurred they did not worry, and out of the largeness of their hearts, without a thought of themselves, they got me what I wanted that moment most in all the world.

The tea was hot and sweetened, and as I drank, vitality swept back into my blood.

Kitty, it seemed, had a small store of groceries concealed somewhere on her person, or on the premises, from which she drew when occasion required. With the genius of her race she had already enlisted supporters all over the building, and Ellen, transmitting her desire, had induced a man on the next floor to supply hot water—tact did all the rest.

I had a chat with Kitty after this refreshment and she warned me very solemnly to avoid certain casual wards.

“Some are good, some are bad, but I manage to get on with them all, except Tonbridge. I can’t never go to Tonbridge—never again.”

It sounded strangely ominous. I was intrigued as to the fate that presided at this place of doom.

“What happened, Kitty?” I asked.

“It’s the law, me dear,” she said, “that the Master mustn’t put you to work on an empty belly; neither must you be put out of the House on an empty belly, and who should know this better than meself. There’s another law, me dear, the Master shan’t put you to do any of his private work, unless he pays for the same. An’ there was a certain woman that came in with me, an’ she told the master that she was by trade a laundress. ‘Then you’ll suit me,’ he says, ‘for I’ve a sight of washing that wants doing.’ ‘An’ I’m not doing your washing,’ says the woman, ‘an’ me wanting

food.' The Master shouted at her, but she was obstinate, an' I'm not blaming her."

" 'An' ye'll do me washing,' says he, 'or ye'll go to gaol.' 'An' it's to gaol I'll go," says she, an' for all I told her what to say she sat there an' she wouldn't speak. She was given in charge, brought before the Bench an' as I'm a living sinner they gave her fourteen days. The Master never said a word it was his own washing, an' the poor creature never had the wit to speak up for herself."

"And how did you come into the story, Kitty?"

"You wait an' listen, me dear. When he was through with giving the poor thing to the police, he comes to me an' wants to start me washing the floor. I didn't argue, I just said, quite quiet, 'But, Master, that's not the law, an' none should know it better than you—an' me belly is empty an' on an empty belly the law says you mustn't put me to work. An' I'll be pleased an' proud to tell the Bench the same.'"

"He scowled at me, but I had me bit of cheese before I scrubbed. I wasn't bearing him any ill-will, but he got a spite against me, an' when it was time for me to leave I had a cup of cold gruel, though something hot in the way of tea is the right of ev'ryone before they leave the House. He wouldn't give me any, so I took the gruel an' hides it in the garden, an' then I walks out an' I asks if there's

anyone can send me to a committee lady, an' don't you forget, me dear, that's what you've got to do. Always go to a committee lady. I found one right enough, an' I asked her very civil if she'd be kind enough to step up to the House an' see me breakfast. An' she came, God bless her, an' I showed her me gruel. She put the Master in his place an' stood by while I had me cup of tea, an' she wished me a pleasant good morning an' gave me sixpence. But—"Kitty spat on her blacklead brush—"I can't never go to Tonbridge again."

But for Kitty's entertainment time would have been a heavy burden. There is nothing so enervating to the spirit as a repetition of totally useless work, and the only alternative to the re-scrubbing of tables already scrubbed, the re-polishing of handles already shining, is to pick oakum. This is of all tasks the most cruel. It tears the finger nails and soils the soul ; it has no value, social or economic. Oakum is employed, it is true, as hospital swabs, but, like all mechanical, impersonal labour, it is untouched with any satisfaction. Oakum-picking is part of the system deliberately designed to deter people from claiming a night's lodging to which, as members of a community heavily rated, they are entitled.

The same system compels the compulsory detention of any casual until the morning of the second day. There could be no ethical or material objection to any woman doing two

or three hours' useful work. This, however, is not the object, which is to undermine all feelings of self-respect, and implant in the mind the belief that poverty is a crime which must be heavily punished. Not by any active or deliberate cruelty, but by the imposition of futile yet degrading denials. This denial of liberty, this abnegation of freedom, is so insistent that only in the last resource will a London outcast go into the House. The case of women on the road is different and will be subsequently dealt with.

Following on the publication in a Sunday newspaper of my article dealing with the Casual Ward, a revision of the rules has taken place. Oakum picking has been abolished for both male and female casuals, and the latter are now permitted to spend two or three hours daily in washing and mending their clothes and attending to their persons. These alterations, with the provision of hot tea at breakfast, already referred to, stand to the credit of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, and though there is still much which awaits reform, these alterations afford me and my fellow casuals cause for thankfulness.

The arrival of the superintendent, a pretty woman, with bobbed hair, aroused my jaded energies. I seized on a duster and rubbed at a door handle, breathing heavily on the brass. My request was explained to her by an attendant official.

"Have you any hope of work?" she asked.

"At Ealing," I answered, "I am sure of a day's charing." Ealing was the first place I could think of.

"Have you been here before?" she asked.

"It's the first time I have ever slept in a casual ward."

"In that case I'll let you go. But you must understand if you come back here within a month you will have to stay for *three* days; if you return next month, you will have to stay the usual time—a day and a night. On no account will you be let off again."

I wanted to blaze out my sense of the injustice of this rule, but I remembered in time that she was but the instrument and not the law, and I realised that the Superintendent, like the other officials, was far more humane than the institution which they served. Besides, I was beginning to have a wholesome fear of the State; I did not want to be thrust back into that awful cell. The thought of a second night in that funnel-shaped coffin appalled me. I hurriedly thanked her, and turned towards the office to get my hat and coat, powder puff and pence.

But I was not to leave the house without further proof of loving kindness. The battered Ellen came after me and slipped into my hand a thing most valued in the outcast life—a *piece of soap*.

I followed the attendant down the stone

stairs, a very nice young woman, whom I shall always remember with gratitude. She advised me to go to the Labour Exchange and said that daily chars were in demand and she wished me good luck with a bright smile.

The door clanged behind me and I went out into the bleak, raw day, feeling as if I had escaped from the grave. I reeled almost with the sense of liberty, a liberty that my hunger, weariness and great distress could not embitter. I understood then why it is that humanity dreads what is known as organised relief. I contrasted the ghastly regulations of the Workhouse with the warm, unfettered welcome of the Salvation Army, and I knew that if I found myself again in such a plight rather than go to the casual ward I would spend the whole night walking the streets.

And if I felt this in an institution characterised by the humanity of the officials, how intolerable must be the bitterness of a House ruled by insentient force? I thought of Kitty standing up before the master at Tonbridge and fighting the Law, and in my first flush of recovered independence I saluted that fine old warrior battling, not for her belly alone, but for the bellies of others.

There is, I understand, a Union of Poor Law Officials, who, apart from their work of obtaining decent wages and conditions for the members, are steadily striving to alter the regulations governing casuals. In this they

are helped by individual guardians. But on the whole Boards have developed little consciousness since the days of Bumble. They have no souls to save nor bodies to be kicked and, while in London, at any rate, superintendents, male and female, have lost that sense of brutal superiority condemned by Dickens, their superiors have remained untouched. In the process of economic evolution, the soul of Bumble has ascended to a higher social plane.

I left before the midday meal, which consists of potatoes, bread, and a little cheese. The evening meal is skilly. The casuals have no tea, except in the morning. I rejoice to think that on this morning on which I write the women at Great Guildford Street have their tea hot ; a small thing—but to them a great feat to have accomplished.

CHAPTER IX

KITTY AND THE WIDOW WHO DRUGGED

WHAT is it that drives women to the Casual Ward? The unthinking will answer at a venture, drink, depravity, or in exceptional cases, persistent misfortune. The class of women which seeks the shelter of the House in Great Guildford Street is drawn from London and the country. The former, in many cases, are casual in every sense of the word. Sometimes an entire family is landed miles away from their home, having lost the excursion train. In such case the police send them to the Metropolitan Asylums Board Office, under the arches of Hungerford Bridge, on the Victoria Embankment. They are given tickets of admission to the work-house, and the mother and children are put together, while the husband goes to the men's ward.

Sometimes a woman suspected of professional begging gets an order for the Casual Ward with her baby, in which case the officials communicate with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The Society has no jurisdiction inside the

House, but an inspector will lurk outside, and, on the appearance of the suspected woman with her children, he will march her off to the police court, where he will apply for a summons against her for neglect. In the majority of instances she will go to prison for a month.

This seems to me to be one of the greatest abuses of the system. It is not only the professional beggar who may be seized on, towards the poor woman who comes in with her baby in a verminous or dirty condition, the same procedure is enacted; having enjoyed the respite of a night's shelter, the unfortunate creature is seized on as she emerges with her child.

In some few cases professional beggars may be neglectful or unkind to their children. Personally, I have many times tried to get a definition of the term "professional." So far as I can gather the authorities lay it down that a "professional" beggar is one who gets his living by the getting of alms. An itinerant street seller who occasionally begs does not come under the same heading. It must be remembered, however, that if a woman with young children stands in the street selling matches, or some other article, she runs the risk of being charged with exposing her children, and once again prison is the conclusion of the whole matter.

What, then, is the "professional" beggar

to do? The root cause of this attempt to gather a livelihood is the housing shortage. It is not possible to pay the rent demanded for even the poorest room unless one member of the family is in receipt of a steady wage. Many of these beggars have lost their husbands, and have no trade by which they can support their family. Even if they had a trade they would have no place in which to ply it. For once a family has been dispossessed of a roof tree, it is unimaginably difficult for them to find another resting place. Wherefore these professional beggars alternate between the streets, the cheaper doss houses, the casual ward and prison. Generally speaking, during one of these terms in gaol, the accused's children are compulsorily adopted. A law exists which empowers the Guardians to take over children without the consent or even knowledge of the parents, who have no right to see them, or even to know their whereabouts until they reach the age of fourteen. Some very pitiful cases have come to my knowledge where a woman, forced by circumstances out of her home, has been charged with neglecting her children, has been sent to prison, and has come out to find that she is childless. Her babies have been taken away from her, and she will see them no more.

There are a certain number of casuals who belong to a very different section of

society. Women of position, who from time to time find themselves without resource, prefer a lodging in the House to a night in the streets. A woman of education and character visits Great Guildford Street every two or three months, and remains her allotted time of two nights and a day. She is the widow of a Government official and in receipt of a good pension. She has acquired the drug habit, however, and to satisfy the craving runs through her money long before the next instalment is due. On receipt of her cheque, she will get her jewellery and clothes out of pawn, make some additions to her wardrobe, and take a decent lodging. And then, gradually, her possessions find their way to the pawnbroker, she is turned out of her room, her shillings dwindle to pence, and she finds herself utterly destitute. When she has completely exhausted the patience of all her friends and relations, she comes to the House, generally at the last lap of the quarter.

I met her once at the Relieving Office under Hungerford Bridge, and she told me in her quiet, well-bred manner she was going to the Casual Ward that night, as she felt she must have a hot bath. The effects of the dope were wearing off, and her pleasant, cultured voice had its inevitable effect.

Everybody likes her at the House, and she is as popular with the casuals as with

the officials. I saw her again one day in the West End, beautifully dressed and evidently in the receipt of her pension. She greeted me most charmingly, and asked me to tea. A few days after I knew she would reappear in rags, and later on go in as a casual.

Then there is a little woman who has had a lawsuit pending for years. She will produce masses of letters and documents—and, like Miss Flite, thrust them into your hand with impassioned vituperation of certain nefarious solicitors and perjured witnesses. She is an embroidress by day, but works only by fits and starts, lured by that mirage of wealth that has led many a poor soul to shipwreck. It may be that one day she will come into her own, or it is equally on the cards that she may throw herself into the river, and end her misfortunes. She is possessed by this one idea, and when she goes into the House, can speak of nothing but her case.

Sometimes an elderly actress, long since out of work, comes to Great Guildford Street. She does not complain, but retails the story of her sufferings and her triumphs without comment. Now and again she gets a job in a "fit-up," and tours through the country from village to village, playing at the local halls. Then again, there is a little woman, the wife, probably, of a professional man, who has outbreaks of dipsomania. On such occasions she will leave her home, sell

what belongings she can carry, and steadily and blindly drink until the fit passes and she finds herself either in a doss house or derelict upon the pavement. It is at this point that, like a homing pigeon, she comes to Southwark, where her clothes are baked and generally tidied, and the rest restores her to something like her normal self. What happens when she goes back nobody knows, but, apparently, her husband always receives her—for every time she come to the casual ward she is wearing clothes which were once expensive and of a new and fashionable cut.

This strange and fitful company flit in and out of the great doors. But for them the House has not the terrors that it holds for the perennially destitute—those who have no abiding place, and for whom life has no foothold. I do not suppose the horror of the coffin-shaped cell ever affects the repose of the widow who drugs, the one who drinks, or those other transitory visitors who take the workhouse in their stride. But for the homeless it remains a thing of menace—a trap from which, once caught, they cannot escape.

Then we come to the women on the road—sturdy, fine specimens, who have become tramps from economic necessity. Such an one is Kitty Grimshaw, who was forced from her lodging in circumstances common to many. Kitty does a regular round, returning to Southwark as the central point. She has still

friends among her former employers, and as she told me, could earn a decent living, if only she had a room. Physically fit and astonishingly witty, she is as clean a living woman as could be found.

"Many's the opportunity I get of seeing life," she told me. "A man will tell me in the road, 'Come on, Kitty, an' give me a love, an' there's a sixpence for you.' But I says to them, 'keep your sixpence, I've a man of me own in the Navy, and, please God, I'll be married next Christmas.'"

She told me a great deal, about her "man." He is a bo'sun's mate, and her great anxiety is to keep from him that she is a tramp. He writes to her every few weeks and always sends a little money.

"How do you get his letters?" I asked. It did not seem possible that the workhouse should act as a clearing station for correspondence.

"I pays an old lady sixpence a week to take his letters in, me dear. She lives at Peckham, an' I call there every time I come to town."

I often think of Kitty with her big, bright eyes and unconquerable spirit. It's a great thing to know that, though life has dealt her such heavy buffets and left her without a home—forcing her to tramp the roads with her small stock of matches, hairpins, etc.—she still preserves her capacity for happiness, her belief in the good things to come. What can

hurt a woman who, at sixty years of age, believes confidently that her man is coming home to marry her? I am not a sentimentalist, but I share Kitty's faith in her sailor. I hope he will come back to her; my belief in humanity will receive a blow if he does not return.

It was Kitty who put me wise as to the advantages and disadvantages of certain local workhouses. But whatever their varying degrees of discomfort, one and all prescribe the same penalty for poverty. You have to pay for your night's bed by a day and night's detention. It is argued that were this punishment abolished, the Houses would be flooded with the destitute. This I deny—for however the externals may be softened, the interior fact remains the same. You are in an institution, the machinery of which, if you are not wary, may catch you up—and once caught in the toils you may abandon hope.

A second argument is that were the casual put to do economic work, it would be in defiance of trade union rules and regulations. I admit the validity of the contention within limits. It would obviously be improper to institute any kind of workshop or factory from which goods could be marketed. The same objection would hold good were the goods simply for local consumption. But there can be nothing to prevent the women being set to do jobs which would materially affect the well

being of all casuals. They could wash the nightgowns, etc., used by the inmates or make new ones. They could hem tea cloths and dusters; they could make up garments from the rolls of material sent by the charitable. They could even knit shoes and frocks for the babies born in the Infirmary. Those with an aptitude for cooking, could work in the kitchen. Two or three hours constructive labour would amply pay for their bed, and at the same time conserve that human dignity to which we are all entitled. The imposition of useless, meaningless tasks has a humiliating effect; they are the outcome of deliberate design.

These and similar reforms could be brought about without any derangement of the civil machinery. If the women who sit as Poor Law Guardians would only rid themselves of the belief that destitution is the outcome of moral delinquency, instead of the result of economic pressure, much could be accomplished. But the majority of women who hold official positions on public bodies are convinced that the casual is an economic, rather than a human problem, and should be dealt with at the cheapest possible rate. It seems to have passed the consciousness of the majority of citizens that any man or woman has the right to claim a bed, inasmuch as they have contributed to the rates. For rights are the last thing that the destitute

are held to possess, and the pauper, casual or residential, is only regarded as a source of national trouble and expense.

One last word I have to say regarding the Casual Ward. When the women are not engaged in the repetition of meaningless tasks, there is nothing for them to do in the way of recreation. Books are not provided—the day room did not boast even a single paper or magazine when I was there. With only bare walls on which to gaze, and nothing but weary hours to look forward to, it is to me a miracle that the mind of the woman who migrates from House to House does not become an utter blank.

CHAPTER X

A VERY GALLANT GENTLEMAN

To spend a whole night in the streets is an experience that has a permanent effect on the psychology.

My first adventure of this kind found me unprepared. I was compelled to walk about, not from lack of money to pay for a bed, but because I could not find any place that would take me in.

It was on a Saturday night, and I had had a good day. I had got into touch with my friend of the plush coat, and had secured from her a number of cigarette cases which I had sold at profit to myself. After I had bought myself a meal and a glass of port, I was the proud possessor of three shillings and sixpence, and I felt entitled to a luxurious time. I had learned from my fellow outcasts that the beds at the Church Army Shelter in Great Peter Street were very cosy, and I anticipated an agreeable lodging. Sunday, I knew, there would not be much trade astir, so I could stay in bed as long as they would let me, buy myself a bit of lunch, and resume my commercial activities in the evening, re-invigorated and refreshed.

Such was the programme I mapped out—and I recall to this moment the pleasurable feeling with which I sauntered down Whitehall. My open-air life, in spite of the biting weather, had given me an added strength, of which hunger and lack of sleep could not deprive me. After all, I thought, there is a lot to be said for the physical existence which consists of a continual struggle to provide the body with essentials and leaves untouched the field of the mind. This may sound fantastic, but it holds much validity. Later on, when you have led the life of the homeless at a continuous stretch, your imagination comes into play, and the old appetite for ideas returns, invigorated. But at the outset the material blocks all other avenues of approach; you want to feed your belly, as Kitty would say, and rest your limbs, and your body is clamorous until these things are accomplished.

It was just after nine when I arrived at the Church Army Shelter. The house has an appearance of prosperity that a little chilled me. Through the wide open door I caught a glimpse of white paint and shining brass, which made me very conscious of my bedraggled skirts. But, after all, I had nothing to fear. I could pay for my bed, and I had experienced so much humanity, such ready kindness in my travels, that I had forgotten the other side of the picture.

A woman directed me to the Sister. I went along a passage, and turning to the right, found myself on a small landing, from which a flight of stairs led down into a very bright and pleasant little kitchen. A young woman, in official cap and apron, was frying sausages which sent forth a most appetising smell.

I made to go down the stairs, but was stopped by a sudden gesture from the Sister. She waved a frying fork at me.

"Stop where you are," she said. "Don't come down here."

As she spoke I felt that I was destitute in every sense of the word.

"Good evening," I said, politely. "May I have a bed?"

"Stay where you are," she repeated, and I went back to the little pen at the top of the stairs, surprised and hurt. I realised for the first time since I began my journey, how demoralising it is to be sized up on your external appearance, and the tears were very near my eyes when I asked again for a bed, and announced that I could pay for it.

The statement did not impress the Sister, and under her eyes my shabbiness increased. Draggled coat and sodden hat grew visibly more and more demoralised.

"Please stay there." The frying fork marked out the frontier. Then there followed a searching cross-examination, which I bore

patiently and politely, under the belief that when the interrogatory was finished I should be allowed a bed. As I discovered later, however, my impression was wrong.

"What is your name and occupation?"

"I am out of work," I said.

"When were you in a regular job?"

"Some time since," I answered, and felt almost criminal.

"Your address?"

"I haven't one."

"No permanent address?"

In face of what I had told her the question seemed irrelevant.

"Well then," she faced me with frank hostility, "where did you spend last night?"

I had to tell her the truth. I could not frame a suitable lie, besides this was a case when, it seemed to me, fiction would not help matters. The Church Army Shelter existed, I had been told, to supply beds at tenpence a night for destitute women. Why, then, should I shirk the admission of a palpable fact? And yet I felt somehow that my answer would do me out of the comfortable bed I needed so badly.

She seemed shocked at the mention of the casual ward, and positively bristled when I confessed to a common lodging house.

"Oh no," she said, "I can't give *you* a bed," and I knew that the words were the spontaneous expression of her feeling. She

did not want me and my bedraggled clothes in her bright, clean kitchen. She had no use for a woman who quite recently had lodged in Kennedy Court, and she hurled at me the condemnation of a whole world when she turned me down.

I have been assured that the Church Army affords help to many destitute women. Facts and figures have been poured upon me. Statistics have set forth how many hundreds and thousands of homeless creatures have been fed and housed. This may be so, but there is an interior sympathy which expresses itself not only in statistics, and when I went to Great Peter Street that night I felt that spirit was not there.

And here I must say a word as to the moral effect of this particular treatment. I discovered that since I had left my home I had acquired a new psychology. I not only looked, but I felt destitute, and the Sister's refusal struck me like a blow in the face. Why should she turn me down? I was clean, I was honest, I had the money to pay—and I needed a comfortable bed.

I suddenly comprehended with a dreadful clearness what destitution does to the soul. It destroys the sense of human dignity, and as your rags are, so you become. I was bedraggled, I looked miserable and I had slept—anywhere, and the Sister in the pretty kitchen cooking supper did not want any-

thing like *me* among the clean, white paint and shining brass fittings.

I once heard a prosperous-looking man say something that expressed what the Sister at that moment must have felt. Someone was speaking with anger as to the terrible condition of the slums which breed deterioration of mind and body.

"That's all very well," said the prosperous one, "but after all they are dogs—let them live in their kennels!"

Well, I hadn't got even a kennel, though at that moment I wanted to slink off and find one. But I wasn't through yet. I did not want unjustly to condemn the Sister, and it was necessary that I should discover the type of lodger that was acceptable.

I lurked in the passage near the entrance—lurking is one of the fine arts I learned in my wanderings—and watched the door to the kitchen like a lynx. Presently a nice-looking young woman carrying a despatch case walked briskly up the street and into the house. I judged her to be a shop assistant, who wanted to get away from living-in for a night. I watched her enter the little lobby and descend the stairs—no frying fork barred her way, and I listened to her conversation with the Sister.

She answered all enquiries satisfactorily and was fixed up for the night.

I left that house with a burning sense of injury.

It was not that I was penniless. I had been through that stage and had not scrupled to ask for help. When I was hungry I had begged. But now it seemed to me I was in an even more desperate condition. I had the money for a decent bed and I could not get one !

Had the Sister merely told me at the first that she had no accommodation I should not have been so hurt. But it seemed to me deliberate cruelty to interrogate me and then to turn me down. The fact that she did this effectively disposes of any suggestion that she knew from the first that there was no bed available, and that this was not so I subsequently learned.

By this time it was close on ten, and I did not relish the walk back to Holborn. Besides, I could not accept the possibility that only in Kennedy Court could I be taken in. Surely there was some other shelter ?

The stars were cruelly bright that evening, and the glory of the sky made my position more unhappy. I think I could have borne it better had it rained. I watched the electric signs on the Embankment dazzling in their shifting brilliance. Where was I to go ? What on earth was I to do ?

I went to the inevitable policeman and asked if he could tell me of a lodging house.

“ There’s one in Belvedere Road, over the Bridge and turn to the right,” he told me, and I set off on my tramp.

There is always something to discover in the land of the homeless. You learn quite a lot about streets which invariably escape your notice in ordinary life. Belvedere Road seemed to me one of the longest in London ; it is full of many and curious depositories. I passed the office of the State of India tucked in between a beer-house and something to do with deep sea fisheries. Large and imposing brass plates recorded the names of obscure Government departments, hoary with age and decrepitude.

There were not many people in the road that night, and those that I passed were respectably dressed and seemed to be hurrying home to a nice supper. When I had almost given up hope of its discovery I chanced on the lodging house.

A large, austere-looking building, the exterior did not discourage me—I was prepared to scale any physical barriers to get a bed. It was the chill of the spirit that held me back. The lodging house was under the auspices of the Church Army, and this paralysed my will. I ought, of course, to have applied for admission, when I might have chanced on a more kindly reception. It was, I admit, a piece of moral cowardice to turn away from a door, but my state of mind was very raw, my emotions had been badly twisted. Something told me I should be refused for the second time, and it is too much

to ask of even destitute humanity to be twice crucified on the same cross.

So I went off again on the tramp, making instinctively for a policeman.

“There’s a place where you may get put up somewhere near Southwark, in the neighbourhood of Union Street, I think.”

It was a cross-country journey, which you could not break by omnibus or tram; but I did not mind, for by this time the fascination of the streets had got me. There are two or three processes which you go through when you are homeless. At first when you have walked about for two or three hours you get very tired. Your head aches and your limbs are like lead; the fact that you have no fixed objective is like a pall on your spirits—you urge yourself forward on mere will. But if you keep on for another hour, or two, or three, your pains vanish—in some strange way you forget cold, hunger and thirst. Your brain is light, your feet move on air. The noises of the street form a monotonous accompaniment which gradually merges into silence; you see little, hear less, feel not at all. Trouble and regret fall from you—it is as though you were doped. You have no sense of distance or time, and gradually your movements become automatic. Instinctively you adopt the slouch of the tramp; you feel yourself one with the streets; you have lost your entity.

I walked through many ages, as it seemed

to me, until I chanced upon the place described by the policeman. By this time it was very late, and as it was Saturday, lodgings for the night were difficult to get. If you keep your eyes open on a Sunday morning you will find there are not many homeless creatures in the streets. Everyone, however desolate, makes a push to get put up, somehow or other, for the seventh day. For this reason the lodging house was full, but the management was very kind. The superintendent saw that I was done, and asked me if I would like to rest by the fire in the kitchen—the same communal kitchen which sheltered me in many parts of London.

I was too tired to observe very closely, and with the understanding and good manners you always find among the destitute, I was not pestered with talk. I just sat by the fireside, feeling sorry for myself and all the rest. (This house is run by the *Christian Herald* Mission, and I found them very Christian. I visited the place later, and in due course shall have something to say on this count. But this story of my first night in the streets must not be broken in its continuity.) Very soon I went on the tramp again.

I could, I am sure, have sat there longer, but if you rest for more than a few minutes you get stiff, not only in body, but in mind, and the “doping” process I have mentioned,

has to be gone through all over again. I explored many of the broad streets and fine roads of the district and gradually worked back to Blackfriars. It was past midnight, but near the Ring there was still a flaring wheelk-stall round which some night birds were eating. There were no women among them. Women are not welcome at any kind of stall ; indeed many coffee stall keepers will not serve you if you are alone, and even when you can persuade the proprietor to let you buy a cup of tea his manner is uncivil, even abusive. The most abject specimen of man is quite welcome if he has the pence to pay for his refreshment. But in the case of women there is the rooted belief that they must be bad lots or they would have a home ; if they are not thieves they are prostitutes, and either way, even a commercial connection with them might cause trouble with the police.

When I hear eloquent and educated women declaim on the platforms as to the wrong done to our sex by some inequality of the law that gives the father priority of control over the child, or makes the husband responsible for his wife's debts, my mind goes spinning back to those real disabilities which press on woman. Feminism might never have blared its trumpet for all the good it has done the derelict. Women have won the vote, it is true, but they have not won the right to decent lodging house accommodation, they

have not won the right to purchase at a coffee stall a cup of tea or coffee or a penny bun. Their only hope of getting such refreshment, with civility, is to accompany a man. Woman *qua* woman among the derelict bears all the disabilities of her sex—and no one cares a pin about it.

I have never been able to understand why because a woman is a prostitute—often because she is tired of being without a bed—Society should be held blameless in withholding from her the rights and privileges of an ordinary citizen. Rightly and properly, public indignation is felt and expressed if a man in any walk of life is refused a glass of beer in a saloon bar, on account of his shabbiness. But no one seems to think it unjust or even strange that a coffee stall keeper should “shoo” off a woman who wants to buy food or drink in the watches of the night. I have tested this particular attitude. I have been out late in my ordinary attire and have asked for a cup of coffee, and I have never been refused. Indeed, the same stall keeper who told me gruffly he did not serve women when I was destitute, was more than affable when I appeared decently dressed. He supposed I was having a look round for curiosity, and was quite ready to give me any number of legends as to his observations of life.

It was a curious experience and taught me very much. Once more I was conscious of the

hideous standard which schedules you solely by externals, and cannot see beyond a woman's bedraggled hat and sodden coat.

The streets by this time were very empty. There was none of that lingering night life that you find in the West or the East End of London. It was as though the pavements had been swept of humanity, and in the frosty air my footsteps rang out sharply. I was not making for any particular spot—I just followed the way that fancy led me, going up one alley and down another. Past an open doorway, inside which a sleeping figure huddled, cowering deep down among its clothes. Sometimes other figures could be seen in a passage-way and on the staircase, all motionless in the drugged sleep of intense fatigue.

As I emerged from one of the courts that intersect the main road at the foot of Blackfriars Bridge I was conscious of being followed. As I walked a shuffling, hesitant tread came behind me. When I stopped the unknown creature stopped as well. It was an eerie feeling, and it broke through the somnolence of nerve and muscle, awaking a sense of actual fear. Stirred to watchfulness, I could not bring myself to look round, but hurried on through a tangle of courts and narrow streets. And then I knew that the more I hurried, the more frightened I should get. Already the pursuer was invested with devilish attributes ;

I felt as though I were going to scream. But I got a grip of myself and stood quite still, waiting for the enemy to come up to me.

Along the pavement shuffled a pitiable looking woman, with the worst pair of boots that I have ever seen. She was hugging a shabby looking bundle and shivered every now and then with the cold. Her face was ageless with suffering, her eyes seemed to have lost all memory of hope.

"Is there anything you want?" said I.
"Can I do anything for you?"

"It's lonely like," she said. "I've been by myself all the evening. I felt I'd like to be near someone for a bit."

The loneliness of the streets is something that comes upon you in great waves. You are not conscious of it when you are doped with the eternal walking about, but when consciousness stirs, you know you are alone, and very frightened. It is as if you were in a cold sea, where you kept afloat by ceaseless striving, knowing that if a billow breaks over you, it will sweep you away.

"Is there anywhere you could get a bed?" said I.

She knew a place, she said, where she could get a shake-down for a few pence.

"One gets tired," she said. "A bed sometimes is past dreaming."

I had given up all thought of a bed for myself that night, so I gave her the price of

mine. She was so surprised that it made me ashamed. She stood with the coppers in her hand, half hesitating as to whether she should take them. I gave her a friendly word and she shuffled off at last, making for the doss house where she hoped to shelter.

By this time I wanted to leave South London and get back to more familiar ground. I crossed Blackfriars Bridge and walked along the Embankment. In less inclement weather you will still find destitutes on the benches by the river, but on this bitter night no one could have spent a night in the open and remained alive.

I passed along in the ghostly silence, broken only by the lapping of the water on the piers. Presently I met another wanderer, a man this time. A genial down-and-out, with the desire for friendly intercourse.

"You're in a hurry, aren't you, mate?" said he.

"It's cold," I answered, "and I want to keep warm."

"Are you making for over the bridges?"

"I've just come from there," said I. "I shall go the other way."

"Well, then, my way shall be yours, mate."

I nodded acquiescence and we walked along in silence, broken occasionally by my attempts at conversation.

"I don't know as I wants to talk, mate,"

said my escort. "I just thought you might like my arm round your waist."

There was a simplicity of approach about his method which took away all suggestion of any possible offence. After all, it was very natural to suppose that a homeless woman should like the attentions of a homeless man, and I could imagine that my friend was a very kindly creature, with a strong and comforting arm.

But custom and training, and some of that fastidiousness which even destitution cannot kill, made his request impossible. I thanked him very kindly, told him that I must hurry on, and left him, puzzled and protesting.

Throughout my many adventures I never chanced on a brutal or uncivil man. There is a gentle chivalry among those who from destitution, or by reason of their employment, are in the streets at night. There is no fear that a workman or a tramp will take you for what you are not, and the suggestion that I might like an arm round my waist is but the equivalent of an invitation to sit out for a dance. The only difference is that in the world of the homeless you just seize the moment as it flies; to-night you may be on Victoria Embankment, to-morrow may find you at Streatham Hill, or Kensal Green.

I have a very precious memory of one particular night. The bitter weather had broken, and it was mild, almost warm. I had

come down the Embankment to go to the Metropolitan Asylums' Board Office under Hungerford Bridge. There, as I have said, you may apply between the hours of 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. for a bed. The lucky ones are sent off to the Salvation Army Shelters, where they are housed free of charge, others are despatched to the Church Army, and the latest comers are sent to Southwark Casual Ward.

I was not lucky on this particular night. The shelters had taken their quota, and there only remained the workhouse. I did not want to repeat my experience; indeed, to tell the truth, I was a little frightened of venturing inside institutional doors again. So when they had given me my admission form and the red counters for my tram fare, I went back to the Embankment and sat down, waiting for something to turn up.

Now, as I always found in this strata of society, silence is a master card. You must leave it to others to speak to you. Two men came and sat beside me. They had been on night shift on some engineering works. They had also been chums in the war and recounted many experiences. I sat and listened with proper admiration, as becomes a woman, and I had my reward.

"George," turned towards me.

"Aren't you the young lady wot I saw come out of the Asylums Board, just now?"

I said that was the case.

"Did you get a bed, my gal?"

"They gave me an order for the workhouse, but I shan't go there, I can't stick it."

"I should say not," said George. "Did you hear that, Dick?" and he motioned to his friend.

"The workhouse ain't any good," said Dick. "Look here, my gal, you come on and have a cup o' cawfee."

I went with him meekly to a coffee stall near Savoy Hill. He bought me a cup of steaming hot coffee of excellent flavour, and offered me a piece of cake.

"You're kindly welcome," he said, politely, and seemed quite hurt when I refused. He told me he went to work every afternoon at four o'clock and got off just before midnight, when he always went for an airing before going home.

"It's a treat to see the dawn come up in St. James' Park. I fair love to sit in the Mall, and the lights across the river ain't so dusty. . . Ain't you got any friends, my gal?"

I said I had some friends, but they were very far away—as indeed they were during the whole of my adventure.

"I live with my father," said Dick. "He's just on seventy-three." He told me the details of his family life, with a simple

continuity, almost wholly lacking in the more sophisticated members of society.

"He's a good old man, though it's a bit dull sometimes. I shan't get married while he lives, you know, there's nobody else to look after him."

I commended his affection and deplored the lack of responsibility evinced by his other relations.

"What do you say to having a walk round St. Thomas's Hospital, my gal. It's pleasant to-night."

But I had had enough of South London and St. Thomas's seemed a long way off.

"I don't think so," I said. "Let's go over to the Embankment and look at the river."

I shall never forget the look in his eyes when I said this.

"None of that, my gal," said he. "None of your looking at the river like that, you know."

I did not realise what he meant, and leaned over the parapet, watching the lights and rather amused.

"Look here, my gal," said he. "It ain't a bit of good trying to throw yourself in, 'cause I shan't let you. Things aren't as bad with you as that, eh?"

There was a warm urgency in his voice, a real solicitude, utterly devoid of any artificiality. I was a woman in distress and the innate strength of the male was stirred in

response to my need. He wasn't going to let me hurt myself if he could help it.

"Oh, I'm not like that," said I. "I shouldn't throw myself in the river just because I was hard up."

"Look here!" His kindly Cockney face peered into mine. "Let me give you your bed money. I can stand it all right."

"It's very kind of you." It was a little difficult to speak, "but I don't think I want a bed to-night. I'll just go up to a lodging house I know and see if they'll let me sit in the kitchen."

"But you're welcome, you know, you're welcome!"

I knew that and told him so with considerable fervour.

"I've taken a liking to you, my gal," said he. "I'm mostly here on the Embankment about twelve, and if you're by to-morrow you'll find me. Don't be afeard, if you can't get any work to-morrow; I shall make you take your bed money then."

He did not try to induce me to stop and chat; he did not try to accompany me. He left me with a beaming smile and the assurance that he would be on the Embankment if I wanted him.

This is but one of the many instances of chivalry that I have met with, and not only I, but others in my case. I don't suppose Dick troubled as to the moral character of the

woman he was good to. I don't suppose he asked himself if I were a prostitute or a thief ; he took a liking to me because he was not blinded by externals, and found something in a destitute woman akin to himself, and he offered to her the testimony of his belief and the great wealth of his generosity.

On most evenings the Asylums Board Office contains an assortment of derelicts. The most wretched of street sellers go there as a last resource. There also women, stranded in London, find their way. The police all over London have instructions to send here outcasts of both sexes who want a bed. Rarely, however, do you find a prostitute among the applicants. Only once did I meet one of their number. She was a pretty little creature and wore her thin coat with an air. She was in the inevitable sunset stockings, but her patent shoes were deplorably rent. She looked round fearfully and came towards me, wanting reassurance.

" There's no fear of their sending me to gaol, dear, is there ? It was a bobby who sent me here, he said they'd give me a bed. I haven't been in bed for two nights, business has been too bad. I couldn't raise the price even for a shake-down. But—but—I can't risk being sent to choky ; you don't think they'll run me in, dear, do you ? "

I told her there was no fear of that, and being called into the next room to give

particulars, she left me with an appealing glance. But she came up to scratch with all the bravery of her type. Through the half-open door I heard the interview. She gave her name, insisted that she was a dressmaker and had been born in Nottingham.

“ My parents ? ” she said. “ Oh, my father was a sergeant-major, and my mother was the daughter of a Baptist minister. Anything else you’d like to know ? ”

The official closed the interrogation and handed her the paper of admission and she went off, with a wave of her hand. Appearances like her’s are fugitive, for, at the risk of repetition, I want to make this plain : the little prostitute avoids the institution like the plague.

I have been told by many people that it is she who makes it impossible to run successful women’s lodging houses. It has been said that Lord Rowton, who devoted so much energy and money to providing houses for destitute men, refused even to contemplate the problem of destitute women. I do not know what is meant by the term successful in this connection. From an economic standpoint the results should be quite satisfactory. From a social standpoint they should be desirable, and as I contend, with the moral standpoint, lodging house-keepers have nothing to do. Nor, in my opinion, has Society. For the causes that drive a girl to the street, few

people are concerned. To suggest that she often sells her body to give herself a bed, is an explanation very few have heard, but it is a true one. And if we get down to bed-rock fundamentals, a homeless woman, whatsoever her moral character, is still a terrible indictment of society. But until Society refuses to act with moral courage, our streets will be full of derelict women, quite as many of them physically as chaste as the most bigoted puritan.

I left the Embankment and went up Whitehall towards St. Martin's Church. The crypt is always open to the homeless, and on a cold night is fairly full. Sleeping figures huddled on forms are dimly seen, each with their own secrets and sufferings. But, though I was dog-tired, I did not feel I could spend the few remaining hours before the dawn in this particular place. The old horror of sleeping strangers that I had first felt at Mare Street, Hackney, came back to me, and I turned from the door and resumed my tramp.

I don't distinctly remember the route I took. I was fairly doped by this time, and a curious exhilaration, almost an exaltation of spirit filled me. It seemed to me I had found freedom, the freedom that comes of cutting off those intimate responsibilities, centred in home and friends. I had no call to be back at any hour ; I could walk for ever, or so long as my strength held out, if I pleased. Imagina-

tion released, or stimulated by hunger, reached out to tracks I had never before explored.

It was with a shock that I found myself at St. Pancras Station just after seven.

I went into the waiting room, and curling up on one of the settees, went to sleep. The destitute can sleep when and where the opportunity finds them, and most mercifully I was not disturbed. When I awoke I had a wash and some breakfast and prepared to face a new day.

CHAPTER XI

WOMANHOOD—*in extremis*

SUNDAY is a meagre day for the street seller. No one likes to be asked to buy matches, at any rate, in the earlier part of the day. There is a general feeling that the unpleasant things of life should be hidden away until after church time. Church-going, as a matter of fact, does not predispose to the giving of alms. I amused myself with experiments in this direction, but never got so much as a penny from any would-be worshipper. After they leave the House of God they are a little softer, and if you attack them at the right moment, between leaving worship and getting home to dinner, you may be quite lucky.

No one with any sense will, of course, try to sell matches or beg coppers from the Sunday crowd in the park. I very much wanted to see what would happen if I asked one of the beautifully gowned women on church parade for the price of a bed, but I felt it was too risky. It was ninety to one that I should have been run in, and that was an experience which during this adventure, at least, I did not want to try.

I did not get much pleasure from watching the people in the park. Generally speaking, I take a vivid interest in clothes, and am always ready to discuss the latest cut or fashion. But this is one of the relaxations that do not appeal to the homeless. I found the joy of smart hats and dainty gowns had left me, with the keen interest in the newspapers which belonged to my other life. Again, flowers, when you are very tired, do not soothe you. You remember dully how much care is bestowed upon them, and in a dumb, unconscious way, resent it. Usually it is not until dusk that the destitute go to the parks in the West End. They prefer the commonwealth of the streets where, every now and then, you may meet an answering eye, and exchange an eloquent glance.

I found that Sunday very dull. Such museums and public galleries as are open do not appeal to the dispossessed. There again you meet the sharp contrast which is unbearable in moments of comparative leisure. For it is in those moments when, for the time being, the fight for bed and board is of necessity suspended, that you touch the bottom of rejection. It is then that woman, no matter what she be, craves for that thing which is called a home.

I tramped about the streets, sat for a while in Trafalgar Square, and had a rasher of bacon and a cup of coffee in an eating house. At

the end of the afternoon I roused myself to begin business, and by a stroke of luck I met my friend of the plush coat in one of her favourite bars.

We did some business together. I made a shilling or two, and then my friend suggested we should go to a cinema, she standing treat. Now I have never been keen on films, except when Charlie Chaplin is on the screen, and I felt quite indifferent at the prospect of such enjoyment. She took two of the cheaper seats in a house near Shaftesbury Avenue, and I waited for the show to begin, quite incurious and even depressed. It was a story of the conventional type, in which a poor girl becomes a leader of society, following a round of luxurious enjoyment, but I found myself suddenly watching the pictures with eagerness, positive pleasure! I dwelt with rapture on her dinner with the hero in an expensive restaurant. I noted with extraordinary precision everything she ate. I enjoyed with her the roses he bought, and thrilled to the music the orchestra was playing. I would not have missed an inch of film. I would not have forfeited any one of the thousand mechanical sensations she enjoyed. It was not until it was all over that I asked myself why this change had come about, why it was that I, and the people in the cheap seats around me, had been wrought up to such excitement, almost ecstasy.

And then the solution came. When you are hungry and cold, without a home and without hope, the "Pictures" warm your imagination, heat your blood and somehow vitalise your body. The blank shutters that hem you in from enjoyment are suddenly down, and you look into a world of light and colour, expectancy and romance—that eternal longing for romance which dies so hardly. This is one of the things that I discovered in my experience. For the same reason this is, I think, why the inhabitants of drab homes in mean streets flock to the cinema. I do not think it has any educational value, nor does it generally stimulate the imagination. But it supplies a lack, and to those whose horizon is bounded by the four walls of a room, badly distempered, or hideously papered, the contemplation of the garish hotel, the spacious restaurant, or impossible heroines of the screen is compensation. This also accounts, I suppose, for the unending supply of this kind of picture. Commerce always caters for a steady public, and while the taste of the artistic is soon surfeited, the intelligence of the thinking easily annoyed, the vast residuum of the patient poor, who unendingly bear the burden of monotony, is a sure and certain market in a world of shifting values.

I parted with my friend outside the cinema. She suggested I should go with her to some doss house in the Borough, but I felt I could

not endure a second dose of that kind of thing. I had been out for thirty-six hours, and the desire for bed was getting clamorous. I set my teeth and vowed that, whatever happened, I would sleep under a roof that night.

I did not want to return to Kennedy Court. Experience, however, had already shown me how difficult it was to get a bed over the week end, so I determined to pay my one and twopence, secure my lodging and then try my luck elsewhere, so that if no fresher accommodation were forthcoming I could be certain of a comparatively decent rest.

But Kennedy Court was full. The weekend, it seems, fills up every available corner in the world that lies beyond the ken of the well-fed. I wasn't cast down, however, but took a tram to Camden Town, the next public lodging house on the list, where conditions are very similar. But here again I was foiled; there was not a bed to be had. I went back to the Strand, determined to fight with every weapon at my service for a roof. I went to Bow Street Police Station and asked if they could tell me of a lodging house within easy distance.

Now I generally found the police helpful in these emergencies, but on this occasion, though their spirit was quite willing, their knowledge was hopelessly out of date.

"There's a Women's Lodging House in Drury Lane, Miss," said the constable on

duty. "You'll find it quite a decent place."

I went on my voyage of discovery, fired with new hope, and after interminable questioning and considerable doubt and pain, discovered the number he had given me. It did not look at all like a lodging house, and when after repeated pealings at the bell, a man appeared, I learned that it was a Baptist Mission.

"It used to be a lodging house twenty years ago," said the caretaker, mournfully, "but it's shut up now, and we're holding service. No, I don't know anywhere you could get a bed. Sister Etheldreda might tell you, she's just round the corner."

But Sister Etheldreda's domain was bolted and barred, and in despair I held up a woman in the street and asked if she could help me. Time was getting on, and I simply could not face the prospect of a second night in the streets.

"There's a decent woman who lets lodgings quite close here ; you'll know the house by the green door and the white steps. She doesn't charge very much and I think you'll be comfortable."

As the proud possessor of a few shillings, I wasn't afraid of the charge, and I walked up, bold as brass, to the green door and gave the regulation two knocks.

By this time it was dark, and in the dimness of the street, broken by one remote lamp, I

hoped my shabbiness would pass unnoticed. But from the lynx eyes of the woman in the white starched apron, and immaculate black dress, there was no escape. One look was quite enough. Before I had time to frame my request I was answered.

"I haven't got a room," she said. "No, I couldn't possibly take you."

She shut the door firmly, with precision, and I knew that I might beat my hands against it—she would not re-open.

I think I went a little mad just then. I felt that London ought to be burned, that fire and brimstone should rain down on a city in which a decent woman could not find a bed. I could not go back to Mare Street, Hackney, it wasn't fair to impose myself upon the Salvation Army as a destitute when I had money in my pocket. Besides, it seemed incredible that such a state of things could be. I returned doggedly to Bow Street and was told of a lodging house at the bottom of Craven Street leading to the Embankment.

There was no such place. The lodging house resolved itself into one of the many private hotels whose price would have been beyond my means, and from whose doors my dilapidated appearance would have barred me.

The Church Army I could not try again and the *Christian Herald* Mission, full the previous night, would obviously still be crowded.

I returned to the charge and interrogated a policeman. He is the one member of the Force who has given me cause for dislike. He is a very superior person, enormously tall, with large and languorous hands that wave imperially towards the traffic at Charing Cross.

"Can you tell me of a place, please, where I can get a decent bed for half-a-crown or three shillings?"

He regarded me as if I were a sort of loathsome microbe, impertinently disturbing his contemplation of the universe.

"Six-and-sixpence is the cheapest you can get a bed in this district," he said, languidly, in a pronounced Oxford accent.

"I can't pay as much as that," I answered.

"If you go across the river you could get it for ninepence."

"I don't want that sort of place," I protested. "I want somewhere respectable."

"You can't get respectability for two and sixpence," he said, as though shocked at the enormity of my demand. "Ninepence, or perhaps fourpence, across the river, or six and sixpence here; there's no choice between."

There was nothing more to be gained by talking to this guardian of the public, so I walked off, burning with rage and literally longing for a fight. Here was I, in the possession of money and unable to find a bed

within three, four, or even five miles of Charing Cross this side of the river. I rebelled at the thought that I was to be cooped in a doss house and I had no wish to return to the casual ward.

I decided to seek information from my own kind, and it being past ten o'clock, I went to the Adelphi Arches already filling up. It is the fashion, nowadays to state that people do not sleep in the streets of London. The Embankment, we are told, has been swept clean of the homeless, while the destitute who used to congregate in the Adelphi, have now migrated to the office under Hungerford Bridge.

This is but the expression of an airy fancy. There are still destitute men and women on the streets of London and, night after night in the cold weather, the Adelphi Arches are crowded with tired souls. They are very silent as a rule, keeping themselves to themselves for the most part, and rarely exchanging confidences. The men there—fewer in number than the women—keep together, a short distance from the other sex, who huddle close, friend and stranger, for the sake of warmth. There is the same tragic resignation in their faces as you find throughout their world, a blind acceptance of fate that has marked them out, for no direct fault or failing, as wanderers of the streets, sentenced to a perpetual walking about, with occasional

periods of rest upon the stones, or, rarer still, a night in a lodging house.

Many of these women could afford a few pence if there were accommodation for them. But social reformers, political leaders, charitable workers, do not see the necessity for such provision. They are outcasts—let them sleep in the streets—and the same individual who will fight fiercely to secure man his human rights, will remain unmoved by an urge to do the same for woman.

I sat down beside an old, old crone, so frail it seemed a miracle that she could bear, her slight body on her attenuated limbs. Her face was of the colour that comes of long years of bad feeding and ill-sleeping, but her eyes were bright and her mouth had not lost its humour. She had a wide knowledge of London's lodging houses and told me that of a Sunday it was hard to get in anywhere.

"I'd advise you to go to Hanbury Street, Whitechapel," she said, "to the Salvation Army Shelter. If they've got a bed, you'll get in there for fivepence."

It did not sound alluring, but there was no choice. I could not face the streets the second night, and I got a district train to Whitechapel.

The capital of the East End was in full flare. The broad pavements were crowded with well dressed women and sleek young men, talking many and foreign tongues. A number of

cafés were open and brilliantly lighted windows showed model hats and dresses, Paris shoes and bags, all in the latest style and at moderate prices. Life in the West End at this hour on a Sunday is stagnant ; in Whitechapel the current is strong. The foreign faces gleam, the quick and eager conversation has a vibrant influence ; one feels very much alive.

Whitechapel to so many is still the synonym for drab wretchedness, that it is perhaps excusable here to point out that the splendid wide road that bisects the district is one of the finest in the metropolis, and still suggests the imperial straightness of the old Roman road on which it stands. There are no mean dwellings in the main thoroughfare, and spacious and leafy squares lie to the north and south. You have to penetrate into the congeries of alleys and bye-ways before you come across the slum area which, even at its worst, is incomparably better than the purlieus of Bethnal Green and Dalston.

I asked my way to Hanbury Street of an attractive little Cockney—one of the few I encountered in this neighbourhood.

“It’s early yet,” she said, “and you’re pretty sure of getting a bed. Come along with me and have a cup of cawfee.”

I was ready for companionship, and eagerly accompanied her to a dingy-looking place in a back street, where they run a sort of club. The room was large and cheery, with white-

washed walls on which were hung attractive posters, Continental, and some clever sketches. There was a bar at the far end of the room, where they served salad and other *delicatessen*, and strong sweet coffee and chocolate. There was no drink served on the premises ; indeed, throughout my wanderings in the underworld, I came across no illicit drinking shop, nor can I think that such an establishment could pay. It is only people with money to burn, who can afford to buy bad liquor at exorbitant rates at illegal hours, and even these do not so much want the drink as to protest against the foolish restriction which seeks to treat adult people like small boys and girls.

The room was fairly crowded with men and women. Most of the former were Jews who had lately come to this country. Their broken English was picturesque, and though they looked revolutionary their sentiments were amiable. There was a strong mixture of the Slav element, both Russian and Polish Jews discussing the respective tyrannies of their adopted countries with animus and emphasis. For the moment England contented them—wages were higher over here, and I gathered they were just a little astonished to find that free speech—within four walls at any rate—still remains free.

It is common knowledge that police spies frequent these places, but the police have a

shrewd idea as to where they will obtain evidence sufficiently important to secure promotion. The club where I was, and very many others like it, has no value to the aspirants of Scotland Yard. The happy hunting ground of narks lies elsewhere, more noticeably in the West Central district, than in the East End of London.

The women of the company were a mixed lot. Some of them worked at millinery and dressmaking, slop shops, *i.e.*, establishments where sweated rates are paid, or in more reputable emporiums. There were some prostitutes, but, as I have always found them, they were quite well mannered, and contributed their quota of gaiety. My Cockney friend was very entertaining. A man handed her a Russian cigarette, which she accepted with delightful abandon.

"There now, dearie," she exclaimed, "with a cup of tea and a slice of lemon I shall be quite Russo Ballo!"

The cup of tea was forthcoming, with a small plate of sausage, brown bread and butter and some chocolollies, a succulent form of sour pickle, much esteemed in the foreign quarters. A large, placid looking woman with Tartar eyes, consumed vast quantities of *bortsch*—a Slav soup made from beetroot and other condiments—conversing the while with a Chinese looking youth, with long, nervous hands, and a black tail coat.

My Cockney friend, having quite clearly "got off," to use her own phraseology, I decided that it was time to depart. It would be no act of friendship on my part to interfere with a deal, so I slipped out of the club as easily as I had come in, with, at bottom, a feeling of regret. That little Whitechapel club, of which there are so many in the district, is the nearest approach to the familiar café of the continent. There is always the stir of social life, an air of geniality, and the centre of attraction is not the bar, laden with food and drink, but the conversation that circles round the marble-topped tables; you feel that here you will find someone to listen to, if not to talk with, a response to human interest, that fluttering up towards joy, even in the most poverty-stricken, which is so curiously absent from the English tea-shop.

There is, as I have cause to know, a *camaraderie* of the tavern which nothing can excel. But for the most part women are barred from this. They are not encouraged to sit about in public houses and join in the discussions of their male friends. They go in to drink, and having drunk, custom requires them to withdraw, while the notion that social intercourse is in any way associated with Lyons or the A.B.C. is too utterly fantastic for consideration.

I had hardly got to the end of the street

when the little Cockney joined me. She had been running hard and was obviously out of breath.

"What did you leave like that for, dear ? " she asked.

" I thought you'd found a friend," I said, " and didn't want me."

" Oh, that's all right," she said. " He can wait. I told yer I'd show yer the wye and I will. I'm going to sleep there myself coming to think of it."

She led me across the broad road and round to the back of a long, narrow street full of high buildings, engineering works, bakeries, etc. We found the shelter tucked away behind a narrow door, which was opened by a pleasant faced young woman, in Army uniform. The shelter is under the control of the Salvation Army, but it is run on ordinary commercial lines. I mean by this that no religious services are held, and that no enquiries are made. You may be good, bad, or indifferent, clean or dirty, so long as you want a bed and can pay fivpence you are admitted.

I paid my money and was led down a passage into an enormous hall. My friend was claimed by an old friend in transit, and got separated from me, and I did not see her again. You are for ever making transitory acquaintances in the world of the destitute. You may feel you have found a kindred mind and sympathetic soul and long to hold renewed

communion, but harsh circumstances, grim and inexorable, force you apart. There is no sustained drama in the underworld, only a series of incidents, beautiful, tragic, heart-rending, which dissolve one into the other like figures on a film.

A wide gallery runs round the hall, which, like the floor, is entirely covered with narrow beds, just wide enough to lie and barely to turn in. There is only enough space between the beds to pass by ; it is a sea of beds, every one of which, on the night when I was there, was occupied ; and the number ran into hundreds. The big gas lamp in the roof burned till dawn, casting fantastic shadows on the sleeping faces. There they all lay—there every night they lie, womanhood *in extremis* ; old, young, middle-aged, hopeless, helpless, desperate and courageous.

The thing that hurt me most was the realisation that these women who have managed to gather their few pence to secure a bed, have lost all knowledge of anything remotely like a home. Migratory as any of the tribes of Asia, they know not where they may pitch their tent.

The place is clean, like all the Salvation Army houses, and there is an entire absence of officialdom. The beds are not too hard and the sheets and covering are clean and hygienic, mattresses and pillows are encased in American cloth, for the sake of sanitation, but with an

outer cover of calico, and there is a sufficiency of bed clothing, also encased.

It was an eerie night. The sleep for which I longed, the sleep for which body and soul were craving would not come. There was something rather terrible in the presence of this army of the night ; I felt myself encompassed by a tide of human desolation which at any moment might overpower and swamp me. I had found the workhouse cell solitary, but there was something worse than solitude in that huge bare ward crowded with beds. Not for one moment was there peace ; there was a stirring as of the leaves in a dense forest, to a continual accompaniment of coughing. I never knew there were so many and such variety of coughs. One poor thing hacked hour after hour, her handkerchief soaked with blood. No one slept kindly, no one found rest. When the continual stirring of the leaves was still, there was a sound as of the wind over the sea, and once a woman's voice screamed out in agony, " I can't breathe—I can't breathe."

The many indescribable noises broke into definite movement. The woman was upstairs in the gallery. With the swift kindliness of the destitute, people rose from their beds and went to her from all over the hall ; curious, pathetic figures, some of them clinging to the last rags of what had been a night dress which they had carried with them on their endless

journeying. Others, partially undressed, with bare feet, in a skirt and a man's sweater; others again, fully dressed, ashamed, perhaps, to show their apologies for underwear, or maybe, too proud or cold, to take their outer garments off. The girl continued to cry out, tossing from side to side. Somebody fetched the superintendent, who presently arrived, followed by an anxious queue. She administered drops, and at the second dose the pain subsided.

"I shouldn't half like some of that," said one of the watchers, raucously.

"Garn!" was the answer. "It's only ginger!" and suddenly the whole place shrieked with mirth. The laughter subsided, the sick woman moaned herself to sleep, the hacking cough broke out with less disturbance. It seemed as though at long last the silence of the night was going to descend upon that troubled place. But with the increased stillness I became aware of other barriers from slumber.

The building has central heating and the warm air, heavy with the strong stench of humanity and the odour of stale clothes—hot, acrid, sickly—made me feel faint. I stumbled across the floor into the flag-stoned passage and got a glass of water. My endurance had nearly reached the limit, I did not see how I was going to live through to the morning. Not so much because of the physical discomforts,

but by reason of my tribulation of soul. The accumulation of experiences had reached a point when it was difficult to bear any more. The knowledge that I was but one of many hundreds of broken women, and that this hall held but a remnant of the legion of the dispossessed, frightened me. It was something in life that I had not guessed at; and the knowledge made me afraid.

It was piercingly cold in the lavatory and I was compelled to go back into the warm stench of the sleeping hall. I curled under the clothes and tried to set myself counting sheep. But it is difficult to realise placid munchers when you are surrounded by suffering humans. The coughing broke out again, and the woman in the bed next to mine began to cry.

"I did so want to sleep," she said. "I've been thinking about getting a bed all day, and now there isn't any chance of peace. My head feels all light, and I shan't be fit for anything to-morrow. If only I could get some sleep!"

She was a frail creature with big, bright eyes, and she told me in a whisper that she worked in a slop shop in Bethnal Green. She used to rent a couple of rooms with her husband and three children, but he was a German and had been killed in the war, and she and the children had lost their home.

"The kids are at an institution in the country," she said. "I used to think that

one day I'd be able to get them back, but I've given up hoping now. It's cruel difficult to live. I'm afraid, somehow, they'll forget me, and I always promised him I'd look after them whatever happened. But, what am I to do ? " she asked. " What am I to do ? "

There was a terrible note of resignation in her voice. Indeed, all these poor women seem to accept their lot as though it was the will of God, rather than the inhumanity of man. Their endurance is heroic, their generosity unending ; all they want is to live decent, human lives, with some sort of a home, no matter how poor, no matter how fragmentary the furnishing.

These things are of no consequence, so long as the home is theirs.

Most of the women who frequent this shelter make Whitechapel their headquarters. Some of them are employed in slop shops, others are street sellers on their own. Others again, do odd jobs of charring, and a fair proportion are out of work dressmakers, fur workers, or employed in similar trades. There are one or two prostitutes, like my little Cockney friend, but they are the exception. The majority of the women are British. I came across one or two Scandinavian women, whose white skins and fair hair were unimpaired by hardship, and I also met a Russian, her native love of adventure undimmed by what she had passed through. She was young, however, and by force of character and personality, likely to

find a niche somehow in the social framework of comfort and security. Only one Jewess did I meet in this shelter. Indeed, I very rarely encountered a woman of this race throughout my experiences. We know, of course, that the percentage of Jews among the population in this country is a small percentage, but even so it is, I think, a testimony to their feeling of racial responsibility that so few among them should be without the means of support.

The bell roused us at six o'clock, and from every bed dragged out a tired figure with the morning cough, faced with the problem of living yet another day. The art of dressing underneath the sheets is practised in White-chapel, and it was curious and fascinating to watch women emerging from the chrysalis of American cloth, booted and hatted.

I did not attempt to wash myself that morning. I had stood all I could endure, and I left the shelter as dirty and begrimed as I had entered it. This, I think, shows what creatures of environment we are. The average middle-class woman is not happy without her morning bath, which is an æsthetic enjoyment as well as physically refreshing. But there was I, after a comparatively short sojourn in a world where baths abound not, dismissing the idea of so much as wiping my face with a damp cloth, or removing the black from my finger nails.

A long course in the underworld would, I am

sure, cure the most fastidious of that impulse towards clean lingerie, which most of us delight in. Dirty faces and hands, soiled underwear, matted hair, what are these but trifles compared with the devastating problems of board and bed? You will not have much energy left to trouble about cleanliness when you have been bedless for a few nights, with but scant intervals of food.

CHAPTER XII

A WORD TO THE WELL-FED

I FOUND myself in an unexpected world that morning. It might have been a continental city, it was so early astir. Whitechapel was already going to work ; foreign faces gleamed brightly in the street. Everyone wished each other good morning—mostly in foreign tongues, and from the open doorways and shop fronts, you caught occasional gleams of vivid colour. Most of the people are Jews especially the small shop-keepers, and some of them have retained to this day the externals of their Eastern origins.

I saw one old man with a long, white beard, clad in the gaberdine—a long, black coat—typical of the Ghettos of Eastern Europe—and presently there emerged into the street a fine-looking old woman, of about seventy, draped in a red shawl, heavily embroidered. I have seen such a figure very often in the Jewish quarter of Warsaw. It was not only the shawl that was symbolic ; this mother in Israel belonged to the old order, under the dispensation of which a married woman always shaved her head, no matter how young or

beautiful she might be. The theory was, that as a wife she must no longer appear beautiful in the eyes of any man, though it seems hard her husband was not the exception. In Warsaw you continually meet an old Jewess with an ill-fitting wig that does not cover her bald head, and it came on me as a startling surprise that I should find such an one in Whitechapel.

Trucks of newly-baked bread, rolls and French twists, and delicious little *brioche* were wheeled about the streets and a stall was already busy with the morning coffee.

It is in Whitechapel also that all kinds of small goods are bought and sold. Here is the market for metal trifles such as I dealt in, and I unearthed a little factory where they turn out cigarette cases and match boxes, the equal of any German products. Here, also, street vendors can buy garters at wholesale prices, powder puffs and boxes of chocolates, etc., all the stock-in-trade of the men and women who work public-house bars and serve the queues outside the theatres. It is too risky to try to get rid of these articles on the kerbstone, unless your position with the police is very strong.

Whitechapel, moreover, is one of those places where goods acquired by mysterious means can, without difficulty, be disposed of. There is a certain public-house I know, where I have seen model dresses change hands for as

many shillings as a Bond Street establishment would charge pounds. Here also come Paris hats, the proceeds of either a wholesale robbery or the outcome of a good shop-lifting. You will see in the Whitechapel Road many a hat which smells of Rue de la Paix, worn by a girl obviously unable to buy it in open market. Furs, also, change hands in the saloon bars of this district, and the less valuable, and also less traceable goods are occasionally bought by the street vendors, who dispose of them to a special *clientèle*.

This is one of the few points where what is known as the criminal world touches the destitute. Generally speaking, the two are separate and distinct. The lawless spirits who adventure in crime, would not tolerate the conditions which the destitute patiently endure. Sometimes, as we have seen, the prostitute crosses the border line and occasionally steals something and is sent to prison. But this is generally the exception ; the two sections are not interchangeable.

Into these bars, where barter and sale nightly take place, the more dejected of the homeless do not come. These have their recognised houses of call, when they have sufficient money to buy themselves a drink. But this is very rarely. Indeed, so low is their scale of living that when a piece of luck enables them to have a glass of beer it not infrequently overpowers them. We often

read of a woman without visible means of support, who has been found drunk and incapable in the street. Her ragged condition has been described, and in nine cases out of ten it is traced to the drink craze, which it is presumed is responsible for her destitution. This, I am convinced, is not the case. What has happened is that the poor thing has been given ale, stout, or even a little whisky, and has been unable to withstand its effects. Quite a number of the destitute have lost the desire for drink ; they are so unaccustomed to its taste that they do not desire it. The elder women like tobacco, when they can get it, which they generally chew, and others have a strong partiality for snuff.

The morning had grown apace when I reached Blackfriars Bridge and joined the huge crowd of women of all ages who daily journey to the City. The spectacle of this activity roused again my desire for some form of regular work. I reported myself to a Labour Exchange, and was sent to an eating house to wash dishes. I got paid eightpence an hour, and for three hours stood at a sink at a back-breaking angle, dealing with grease-laden dishes, basins and knives and forks.

It was a noisome occupation, and I could not face the possibility of practising it daily. The space was confined and the ventilation inadequate. By the time I signed off I was physically sick.

It is, I think, the re-invigoration of the open air that enables the homeless to carry on for so many years. Even in the meanest London street you feel the effects of the open sky and the lack of space within the four walls of a building tries you very heavily. This factor must be taken into account in judging those tramps, of whom it is so often said that they object to regular work. I found the confines of a building pressed very hardly on my spirits after but a short period of life in the streets. And if this was the effect on me, who had but tasted destitution, what must the influence of the open air be to those who can remember no other form of existence? It is one of the most curious facts that even in the depth of physical degradation, there are compensations, and those who find themselves at the close of a long day without the hope of a bed, will feel that they have the endurance to go through the night and start again the following morning.

I have been asked often as to the food for which the homeless crave. When you have but a few pence—and it is very rarely there is any more—you go generally to the nearest fried-fish shop and spend your coppers on a piece of haddock and potatoes. If you can add a dash of sauce or a few pickles, you have an ideal meal. Meat is beyond the means of the destitute, save in the way of sausages, and if it were not so, the quality obtainable would

put you off your meal. I have already touched on the nausea which ensues on an attempt to satisfy hunger on dry, stale bread. It is worse than useless to give loaves or slices to any beggar at your back door. But you may always be sure one thing will be welcomed, a cup of hot tea, hot coffee, or even cocoa. But it must be hot ; the physical craving for a hot drink is almost overmastering.

I remember on one occasion a young woman marched into a café in the East End and demanded a cup of tea. She was in a parlous state as regards boots and dress generally, but her hair was only comparatively dirty, by which I mean she was not afflicted with those masses of tangled growth that have so tragic a significance. She drank her tea, seated at a table, then, having drained the last drop, she marched up to the counter.

"I haven't got any money to pay for it," she said ; "you can send to the police if you like—I don't mind. But I've had my tea," she added, "you can't take that from me !"

The proprietor, a polyglot of many nationalities, protested vehemently. But he did not send for the police, and when she went away he gave her some slices of liver sausage with some pickle and a fresh roll.

It is not often that you come across such understanding, and to risk getting food without money is to chance arrest. When once you have been charged at the police court

the difficulties of existence are increased a hundredfold. The destitute woman, like the prostitute, once she has been charged, is liable to be run in continuously. Keep out of the police net, and if you are quiet and decently behaved, you will remain out. Once you are emmeshed, unless you are possessed of great force of will and character, you may as well give up the fight.

It is not often the destitute show any great emotion. The women who now and again get a lodging, relieve their pent-up feelings when they find themselves beneath a roof, but the woman who spends more nights in the open than nights in a shelter, has become so far doped that it is pain to her to cry. I have seen women suddenly give way to what looks like causeless anger and fall to abusing a stranger, take up a stone and throw it at a door. I have myself experienced that overwhelming desire to smash up the smug contentment of the well-fed and well-housed section of society. But of the softer feelings little is shown. When a woman gives way to tears you feel as if you had been present at some secret and terrible exposure.

It was at a poor doss house in the North of London that I saw a girl give way to sudden irrepressible grief. She was not like the woman in Kennedy Court, she was nourished on too low a diet for such vigorous display. She sat on her bed in the drab garment, dis-

coloured by wind and weather, which had grown to her like an animal's skin, and the tears poured down her face. She had not a handkerchief on which to wipe them, and now and again she put up her arm, with its dirty coat sleeve, and mopped her cheeks. At first we did not take any notice. It is not polite to offer sympathy or comment. But when her thin shoulders began to shake, and her hands opened and shut convulsively, we knew the breaking point was reached. She explained that her feet hurt her, and we took off the unutterable pieces of leather, bound together by string, and the rags that had once been stockings. Her feet were a mass of running sores, only the most superhuman courage could have forced her to walk upon them. We got round the old woman in charge of the place and persuaded her to produce hot water, and one of us bathed the poor feet and dried them on an apology for a towel. But we knew that in a very little while the flesh would be as discoloured and as painful as it had been. It was unthinkable that she should again put on those jagged bits of leather, those worn and evil-smelling cotton rags. Instinctively we looked at each other. There was some seven or eight women in the room, and we produced our pence and together raised about a shilling. Then a lodger found another pair of stockings in her bundle, gave them to the girl, and a spirited conversation with the woman in charge

induced her to produce an aged pair of men's boots, whose tops were not broken. We gave her fourpence for these, and another twopence for a cup of tea and a piece of bread and marge.

The girl accepted these offerings quite quietly; she was too dazed to say much, but at least we had the satisfaction of knowing that her feet would not be quite so painful, and that she would set out on her day's tramp with at least something towards board and lodging.

And here I would beg those of my readers, who feel in any sense the desire to help their destitute sisters, to remember their perpetual need for shoes and boots. If it were possible to have some kind of clearing house, where cast-off foot gear could be deposited and sent out again to women's lodging houses, conditions might be alleviated. It is, I know, the custom of many households to send their cast-off clothes and other oddments to the Salvation Army and the Church Army, and I have nothing to urge against such methods. I would only say that, generally speaking, the down and outs do not, and cannot, benefit by these gifts, for the big organisations have many recognised outlets for the disposal of clothes, and the destitute do not come within their orbit. If, however, people would remit their cast-off foot-gear to definite shelters with the request that those women who wanted

boots might be served, something might be done to assuage the most poignant sufferings of those street dwellers, whose feet are so rarely at rest.

It should not be difficult to arrange such a distribution at the lodging houses licensed by the London County Council, if and when that body institutes a proper system of inspection. As things are, it seems to me highly improbable that the managers or proprietors of these places would concern themselves as to which of their casual inmates wanted boots.

Another alternative would be to establish a place apart from any lodging house, where, for a few pence—or for nothing—derelicts could get covering for their feet. It is, at any rate, worth consideration, for the outlay would be very small, and many of those who at present devote quite large sums to the support of what are termed organised charities, would find that the reduction of comparatively a few shillings from their cheques, would result in that direct alleviation which is the object of the generous-minded.

I have not yet discovered any shelter or lodging house where such help is forthcoming. The Salvation Army Centre in Mare Street do their best to deal with human down and outs, and if they are employable, will find them work and supply a wardrobe. But, as I have said, a very large proportion of the women who walk the pavements have gone

beyond regularised assistance, and before they could fit themselves for work, they would have to be found some tiny home of their own where they could recover their powers of resistance. Meanwhile, they endure physical hardships which could be alleviated by a small expenditure of money and the cost of some trouble and thought. Once you have seen the feet of the outcast, you realise the most burning and most practical thing to do, next to the provision of a bed, is to find boots.

The homeless are, I admit, difficult to help through the ordinary channels. People who come under sectional headings—discharged prisoners, convicted prostitutes, unmarried mothers—are more easily assisted. Human nature has a weakness for labels. It is distressed, almost affronted, by the silence of apparently inexplicable human wreckage.

“I always ask one of these women you speak of, what is wrong with her,” said a very kindly friend of mine. “But they never will tell me anything. I give them money and buy their matches or anything they have to sell, and I always try to have a little talk with them, but they won’t answer. I ask them where they’re going to sleep, and if they’ve walked far, and they just mumble something and move away.”

I suppose it is difficult if you have never been within a mile of destitution to realise how completely you are cut off from the com-

mon channels of communication. The poor women my friend referred to, very probably, did not know exactly where they had come from ; they certainly did not know where they would sleep. Further, they associate interrogation with officialdom, and the never absent fear of the institution governs their mind. If they say nothing, little can be proved against them. Once they give an account of themselves they may be caught out in a lie, and between a false statement and a policeman there is a pitifully short distance. You must never hope to learn by direct question. The only way you can find out the truth is to go down into the depths, lead their lives and endure their privations.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAP OF THE INSTITUTION

WHEN I began this account of my experiences, I made the point that it was impossible for a woman without a reference or a friendly recommendation to find employment of a regular and recognised description. I steadily tried to get some sort of daily work, but all I succeeded in obtaining was, as I have said, occasional charring jobs, the cleaning of steps, and washing up in a cheap restaurant. And, meanwhile—and I want to emphasise this point—I had a skilled trade at my fingers' ends. I can cook sufficiently well to get a situation to-morrow, backed up by a personal character from an employer or a friend. But, because I could produce no such proofs of honesty, I was compelled to earn my bread from a different angle.

It may be, and has been, argued that to take a strange woman into your house is to court disaster, it being the explicit belief of ninety people out of every hundred that unrecommended humanity is inevitably dishonest. Indeed, the faith in what is known as a "character" is almost touching in its inno-

cence. Few women give an entirely truthful estimate of their late employee, a wholesome fear of an action for slander restrains the expression of some of their opinions, while fundamental good-heartedness acts as a similar deterrent. For this reason indifferent cooks get situation after situation, and complacently impair the digestions and spoil the tempers of countless families. It occurs to me that it should not need very great courage to engage a woman on probation, so to speak, and set her to cook a specimen meal. If she is adequate, she might be retained, even if such retention meant keeping a close eye on the silver. It would not call for a very great display of trust to adopt this course, remembering how blindly the majority of housewives accept the statement of their predecessors in regard to a prospective household gem.

I do not suggest that a number of outcasts—using the term in the sense that they are outcast from home and security—are competent cooks. But a certain proportion are skilled, as I have said, in the domestic arts, and if an employer could persuade herself to try them out at a proper wage—none of your ninepence an hour—they would discover unlooked for ability, and at the same time have the satisfaction of feeling that they had offered an opportunity, very rarely to be found.

Clothes are, of course, the great barrier. I have experimented deliberately to test my

theory that where a woman is concerned, her social value is estimated on externals. I have gone out of my home in a soiled raincoat and a bedraggled hat, and have immediately been placed in a totally different social strata from that to which I am usually relegated. The same policeman who would touch his hat when I pass him at the corner of the street in my ordinary attire, stares blankly at me when I put on shabby garments. The porter at a block of flats who knows me very well and is always most polite, has failed to recognise me when I turned up in what my friends call my "Annie Turner" clothes. I do not think this is the case where a destitute man is concerned. People have learned that they must look beneath the habit in the case of masculine appraisal, but women still suffer from the old test. Bedraggled garments not only spell destitution, but incapacity, dishonesty, and a total lack of sex morals.

In my own particular case I discovered a means profitably to exploit such personality as I possess. I developed my latent talent for commerce, and evolved a system of attack which brought me, in gradual stages of increase, enough to live on. When I went back to my home I was making sufficient on the commission I received on the sale of metal cigarette cases, etc., to keep me in meals, find me a bed—when there was one available—and to permit me to have an occasional wash and

bath. Had I kept on a little longer, by extending my area of trade and increasing my experience, I should have been able, either to rent a weekly bed at a lodging house, or to have taken one of those top attics, which are to be found in the alleys and by-ways of Soho.

It would have taken me a long time, however, to have accumulated sufficient to renovate my wardrobe. I might have managed a new pair of shoes, and perhaps, have picked up a hat in one of the cheaper stalls at Berwick Market, the New Cut or Petticoat Lane, but a complete renewal of wardrobe could not have been accomplished without considerable difficulty. Still, I formed the nucleus of a livelihood which in the fullness of time, would, I think, have grown into a moderate but stable income.

When I had reached that point in my commercial career, however, I should have been faced by new difficulties. Directly you grow prosperous in this particular walk of life, the police get wise to you. While you remain furtive, dirty, and obviously destitute, so long as you are civilly spoken and quiet mannered you are allowed to rub along. But appear on your beat with the least appearance of well-doing, and keep up that appearance for a week or ten days and you will be pounced upon. For this reason my friend of the black plush coat clung to her unsavoury habiliments. For this reason—

apart from her vagrant instinct and her tendency to drug—she would never sleep two nights running in the same house. Admitted, that her appearance militated against her in the sense that customers were not drawn towards her, still this disability was counter-balanced by her employment of younger and less dilapidated women who, like myself, worked on commission for sales.

I should say this woman has a tidy sum put away somewhere, probably sewn in the innermost recesses of her rags, where even she cannot easily get hold of it. I know of more than one case where women carry a sum about with them that would surprise the casual observer, but it is very rarely that they will break into this store. They know that once this happens they may lack the resolution to stay their hand, and so winter and summer the greasy wad of fingered notes, done up in newspaper, sewn into oilskin and packed away with intimate garments next the skin, travels about with the owner, for in no circumstances would my friend or those like her, put their money into any sort of bank.

These cases are by no means numerous, nor do I for a moment want to suggest that it is common for an outcast to have a secret hoard. But such phenomena do exist, and they are generally recruited from the educated classes. They have not always been homeless, but have become Arabs of the pavement

through circumstances allied to an inborn dislike of ordered routine. Very often these people disappear from the homeless world and return to the place from whence they came. But I do not think they permanently stay there. There is an urge about street life difficult to resist, and once you have experienced the stimulus of an almost complete isolation, there is a danger that you may indulge in it too often.

Such people as I have indicated, do not offer the problems which assail the rank and file. Personality, which in its ultimate, means resistance, is difficult to destroy, but given a long monotone of semi-starvation and lack of easy sleep, its fibres disintegrate and gradually weaken. Change of suffering is a stimulus ; the sudden alternation of prosperity with penury inspires the imagination and revives the spirit. My friend of the plush coat had known such contrasting periods and by such means maintained her capacity to fight. But the overwhelming majority of the destitute work an unending treadmill in which lean day succeeds lean day, varied only by the fitful night.

Such an existence effaces individuality, weighs down the will, clogs the instinct to do battle which is the heritage of man. And so my sisters of the street have not the power to find out newer ways of making pence. They respond automatically to a rebuff and human

sympathy has lost for them its interior significance.

Something of this you will meet in a woman who has served a long term of imprisonment. She is, as it were, hypnotised by an unending submission and has lost even the desire to break her bonds. One instinct only remains vital, apart from the desire for food and shelter, and that is the passionate determination not to be trapped into an institution.

"I told one of these women that she was really too ill to be in the streets, and I tried to persuade her to go to a hospital, or to let me get her into the infirmary. I looked round to see if I could find a taxi, so that I could take her right away. But when I went to speak to her she had gone. Now, why do you suppose she did that?"

The question was put to me by a really good woman, who most sincerely wanted to assist the human wreck she had encountered. There was in her mind a suspicion that there was some dark and undesirable reason for this strange evasion.

"Hospitals are always so clean, and you get plenty of care at an infirmary. She must have known she would be more comfortable there than walking about."

I tried to explain that there is a bondage of the soul more difficult to bear than even those privations of the body that are the daily

portion of the homeless. But I could not make this kind, good creature understand.

"She would have been better in an Institution, and I don't see that it matters even if she doesn't want to go there. She ought to have been taken."

Those last words embody the terror of the homeless. It is the trap they always scent, and from which, to the last gasp, they will run away. For there is that in common throughout the whole company of the destitute—workers in slop-shops, street-sellers, tramps and prostitutes, one and all, they will try their strength to the verge of collapse before they will enter the portals of any place within the shadow of state control.

Hospitals, we know, are exempt from constituted authority. But there is always the dread that a case of destitution may be referred to the Poor Law Guardians, and that the unhappy "case" may find herself imprisoned in a workhouse.

What then is to be done for these women?

In the first place I would enlist the help of the charitable to put up a number of free shelters to be run on the principles adopted by the Salvation Army, which demands no explanations and institutes no inspection, the lack of money for a bed being the sole requirement for admission.

The next step should be shelters where beds can be obtained for threepence, rising in

certain districts to fivepence. All these places should afford facilities for washing and should command continual supply of water, hot and cold. There might be an employment bureau in connection with the shelter where those women who are skilled in any domestic work could apply for jobs. The cost of such a scheme would not be enormous. The erection of even one such shelter would do much to assist the work already carried on at the shelter in Crispin Street, Bishopsgate. It should not be regarded as in any sense a philanthropic enterprise, for philanthropy is generally associated with the idea of dividends, either in this world or the next. It should be, to my mind, a practical recognition of that sisterhood of which we women prate so much, and in whose cause we do so little. While one woman has to walk the streets at night without a place to lay her head, those of us who possess homes, however small, however poor, should regard it as an occasion of reproach. For in the ultimate—I put it to every woman who may read this—there is nothing in ourselves which has accorded us a happier fate. There, but by the favour of circumstances, might go you or I.

Once the homeless woman could feel there was a place for her, the power of resistance would enlarge, and with that quickness, indestructible in our sex, she might re-discover latent abilities. Only, and this is a point

whose importance cannot be over-estimated, the homeless must not be subjected to any inquisition. If you want to know how they live you must be patient, and if you are of them they will tell you themselves.

Women of the "tramp" category, who, like my splendid Kitty of the Casual Ward, pass their life upon the road, need help of a different kind. What is wanted for them is housing accommodation. It is here that individuals can do very much. Put Kitty, or any of her kind into a room, and she will become a self-supporting citizen. They are splendid workers these women of the soil, who can plant, and hoe and dig with any man, and at the same time possess a talent for the softer things of domestic life. A hostel for women engaged in manual work is what is needed, where at a small rental weekly, each tenant could make her own home.

But such a place must be conserved for women such as these. There are innumerable hostels where members of the middle class, typists, secretaries and the rest, can get ample accommodation. I do not know of any place where rooms are let out to women who, like Kitty, cannot ply their trade because they have no permanent place of abode.

Then we have the question of the common lodging house where, at prices varying from tenpence to one and fourpence per night, a bed can be secured. This is an economic propo-

stion, and as such should engage the attention of the capitalist. As I have said, the London County Council refuses to assume the responsibility of running municipal lodging houses for the female sex on the plea that we are difficult to manage. This means, in effect, that the L.C.C., like the majority of people, confuse lack of means with lack of morals, and are terrified to be associated in the work of providing beds for prostitutes lest they should be accused of countenancing a loose method of life.

Prostitutes, indeed, form a fair proportion of the lodgers in licensed houses, and for this reason I suppose the L.C.C. continues to remain extraordinarily lax in the matter of inspection. It would seem that prostitutes may be put to sleep in soiled sheets and on insanitary mattresses; that their lack of chastity should debar them from the use of baths, and that the process of washing shall assume the form of a penance in the winter and an odorous experience in the summer. Prostitutes, in fact, may be exploited by anyone whom the L.C.C. decides to license, and none of the excellent gentlemen and virtuous ladies, who are elected to a seat on the council, are concerned to raise a finger on their behalf.

There are many women speakers who grow eloquent upon the platform on the subject of equal immorality for both sexes. But while

they demand ample scope for the practice of free love, they are quite indifferent to the housing conditions of the freelance in the sisterhood. The fact, apparently, that "a little money passes" is sufficient to shut out the less successful harlot from the smallest amenity of life. Thus, while the male party to a sex transaction in a back alley may straightway depart to a bed in Rowton House, clean, well ordered, with the fullest lavatory accommodation, the partner of his moral lapse must be content with unsavoury surroundings at the same price.

An illogical and indefensible position.

There is yet another category of the destitute. Women, who, as I was, are in need of temporary shelter: who are neither tramps nor prostitutes, but simply down on their luck, and for the time being are without any shelter or unable to get one when they have the money to pay for it. The first named have certain places where they can go free of charge. Of these the largest and most kindly run is a Catholic Shelter in Crispin Street under the auspices of the Sisters of the neighbouring Convent of Mercy. This place will be dealt with in a chapter to itself. I have already referred to it, and I mention it now as being on the list of refuges for the penniless, without distinction of creed, and regardless of record. Other shelters include Mare Street, Hackney, and the

Christian Herald Mission in Union Street, Southwark, which I shall also describe. A third and smaller shelter is in King's Road, Chelsea. Primarily a home for discharged women prisoners, there are a few beds reserved for the homeless, and even when these are filled it is rarely that anyone is turned away. When we add to these the casual ward of Southwark Workhouse, we cover the free lodgings to be found in London, with the exception, possibly, of some small charitable houses known only to the few.

For the woman who can pay, there are only the public lodging houses, and when these are full, she must either walk the streets, or claim a corner in one of these free shelters.

The last category of the destitute can be described as rovers. Unlike my friend of the plush coat, they do not suggest a romantic, or a criminal past. Neither are they heavy drinkers, nor addicted to dope. They are born with that migratory instinct which prevents them from permanently settling to anything or in any place. They preserve their personality undimmed, for the reason that when times get too bad, they have sufficient resilience to emerge from the underworld and do profitable work.

The rovers are invariably artistic. Men and women, and I have met both, they always possess the gift of expression. They are musicians, singers, and can spontaneously

dramatise a situation or a story. Some of them are clever draughtsmen and can dash off a pencil portrait of an onlooker with a sureness of line that is amazing. Their tastes are not expensive, they can be as charming and as content in a shelter as in a restaurant or studio. The one thing they cannot and do not bear is any measure of routine.

Outcasts of this type then find their way to the Crispin Refuge. One such case I remember where a woman of undoubted genius continually returned to claim a bed. She was a brilliant pianist, with exceptional execution, and when she touched the notes you sat up at attention, recognising a master hand. A handsome woman, with a fine head, her accent was cultured, and she could talk on any subject. I was told that this woman's daughter came to see her at the refuge. She was in a good position, with a husband and children and was always trying to persuade her mother to settle down. It seems that the latter was the widow of a clergyman, who, apparently unable to bear parochial restraint after his death, went forth into the wide world. There was not any money forthcoming from the deceased gentleman, but the daughter explained that she could give her mother a home, and that friends would be pleased to help, and in any case there was always her gift for music.

The "rover" allowed the daughter to take

her out to dinner and to buy tickets for a concert. But further than that she would not go. She stayed her allotted time at the refuge and then departed to play at a cinema in the East End until, growing tired of her paid monotony, she drifted off again, and in the fullness of time came back to Crispin Street.

These types are, of course, few and no social system could cater for them; nor need we waste sympathy upon them, for they possess the thing they desire most—freedom from material responsibilities and from that burden of possessions which so often blocks the way to the kingdom of the spirit.

There will always be wanderers to and fro on the face of the earth, and you may know them by their clear gaze which seems to look upon horizons far beyond our sight. They are largely indifferent to hunger, cold or exposure because—and this is the secret of their content—they can always turn the exigence of the moment to account. Their wants being but small, they have but to do a hand's turn to find their outstretched palm holds money.

CHAPTER XIV

AT ST. CRISPIN'S

THE refuge in Crispin's Street was founded sixty years ago by one John Gilbert, D.D. It is supported entirely by voluntary contributions, and the work of administration and general management is performed by nuns of the Convent of Mercy. The refuge opens on the first of November and closes on the first of May. At five o'clock each night in these winter months the doors are opened, and the long waiting queue of homeless women let in.

Each applicant is asked her name and nothing else. The sole qualification necessary is her need; nor do the women come alone. The majority of them bring their children, small infants, little toddlers and young boys and girls. There is nothing formal or official in the great, big dining-room. Long trestle tables run down each side, there is a fireplace at each end from which a cheery blaze leaps out infinitely heartening of a bleak night. One hundred and twelve women are admitted. Beyond that number accommodation cannot go.

There is a steady competition for the privilege of staying at the refuge, and for this reason its whereabouts is not generally discussed in the underworld. Those who know, not unnaturally want to keep the knowledge to themselves, for once you are in the refuge you may rely on fairly consecutive accommodation through the worst months of the year.

When the quota of women is complete the outer doors are shut. A bell rings and everyone troops down to the lavatories and bathrooms. Here is ample accommodation for washing and bathing, with a copper for the boiling of soiled clothes. Clean towels are provided and good soap, and the women revel in the opportunity of cleansing their bodies from the dirt and grime inseparable from their life. There is a foot-bath which runs the length of the wall, and pails, one for each woman, filled with hot water, for those who do not desire total immersion. They wash, not only themselves, but their children and their clothes, which dry speedily before a roaring fire. Some of these poor women have literally no underwear, being garbed only in those rags which form a kind of outer garment. These are provided with chemises and petticoats with a kindly sympathy as healing as the fresh linen.

Ablutions finished, the hundred and twelve, with their attendant children, troop up again

to the dining-room, where they have a comfortable meal of cocoa and fresh rolls. Some of the women bring in with them a little butter or jam, which they are allowed to spread upon the bread.

“ I always feel I should like to give dripping—butter’s quite impossible at the price,” said one of the Sisters, “ but it’s not only the cost of the dripping, it would mean that we should have to provide somebody special to spread it. We haven’t a moment to spare as it is.” On Sunday morning, however, butter is served with the coffee and rolls which every inmate has for breakfast.

The evening meal over, the women sit and talk. Somebody plays the piano—it is an excellent instrument—or sings, or recites, and on occasion the company is moved to dance—middle-aged mothers with big families, elderly grandames and girls in their teens.

There is an atmosphere of cheerfulness, but those who wish can pour out their sorrows, or discuss their prospects with the Sister-in-Charge.

Each inmate is entitled to spend five nights in the refuge, going out during the day to look for work, or follow her own devices. The children, however, stay indoors and go to the school attached to the Convent. Before the expiry of the fifth day enquiries are made as to whether the woman can give

any reference. The name of a former employer, however casual, is sufficient, and if this is forthcoming, the length of her stay is increased to another eight days. If, during that time, she is able to get ever so little work, she gets a further invitation for sixteen days, and then goes back to five and so on.

This system works out to the benefit of what we may describe as a small corporation of families, who otherwise would pass the winter in a state of utter wretchedness, if not exposure. There are, of course, a certain number of casual women who depart after their five nights ; some of them do not even stay the whole length of that period. The Sisters are able to find employment for a fair percentage. The newspapers are available each morning and applications are received at the refuge for domestic servants and charwomen. Girls who desire to take up domestic service have a period of training in the convent, and every effort is made to keep in touch with as many refugees as possible.

The dormitory is a huge room with a series of bunks ranged side by side. One hundred and twelve bunks, each one lined with leather for the sake of cleanliness and covered with American cloth ; a flock pillow, also covered ; and a counterpane of quilted leather. Huge fires burn in the dormitory, and the ease and comfort of the warmth takes the stiffness

from the limbs, relaxes the over-strained muscles and softens the skin.

The women sleep very placidly and awake really refreshed. Breakfast is served in the dining-room, after which the inmates disperse for the day. The Sister in Charge of the refuge, like most other thoughtful and observant women who help the poor, is of the opinion that destitution has enormously increased since the war owing to the housing famine. It often happens that a woman will come to her in infinite distress, and explain that, like her husband, she is out at work, and that at the end of the day they have returned to find their bits of furniture put on to the landing and the door of their room locked. Another tenant has been found at a higher rent, and the landlord has simply and forcibly ejected them, flinging father, mother and children into the street.

It is very easy to point out that such cases can appeal to the law, but while the law is being put in motion, the furniture disintegrates or disappears, or, maybe, has to be sold to defray expenses, so that in the ultimate the law does not help at all. If it were possible to pass an act which should bring such a proceeding within the immediate jurisdiction of the police court, so that an officer could straightway go to the landlord and bring him up before the magistrate, something might be done ; meanwhile rents

go up and up, rooms are more difficult to get, and the landlord of the house seizes every opportunity of increasing his income. In Spitalfields a family thus dispossessed can go to the shelter, the husband is given house room in the men's quarters, and the wife and children are looked after with the rest. Some few cases there are, the sister admitted, where destitution has been induced by drink. Such cases are always advanced in life; young and middle-aged women cannot and do not drink, as I have myself observed.

It will be seen that for the most part the hospitality of the Crispin Shelter is enjoyed by a selective group, and this, not through any exercise of favouritism, but because the old *habitués* line up early and get in first.

During the winter evenings, entertainments are organised at the shelter; professional singers, pianists and actors come down and give turns. Indeed, the whole atmosphere is stimulative, and the homeless look forward to the social, quite as much as to the material, benefits provided. On Sunday also, a dinner of hot soup is provided, to which all who so desire may come. They gather in from the street to enjoy the welcome fare. It is good soup, hot, strong, and clean, and it is prepared in large boilers, from which great ladles pour the liquid into huge tureens. No one is turned hungry away. There is a full attend-

ance, but, like the kindly deeds for which this refuge is noted, the fame is not blazoned abroad. The destitute have their own secrets, and as I have said, they may quite possibly preserve a discreet silence, lest they should be crowded out. Refuges run on these lines near the centre of London, and in the outlying suburbs, would do very much to solve the problem of the destitute woman unable to pay for her bed. The working expenses of St. Crispin, as will be seen, are not excessive, and if a registry of employment were kept at each establishment, a certain proportion would emerge from the ranks of the outcast into self-support. Thousands of pounds every year are subscribed for the erection of hostels, where business women and girls engaged in offices may live in decent surroundings, at a figure considerably below the average rate demanded by a boarding house.

I am very glad to feel that business women and girls have these advantages, but it is not for them I am concerned. It is for those others, who, save for the helping hand extended by the Crispin Refuge and one or two similar places, have no hope of a bed unless they can collect the necessary pence.

I have mentioned that those women who wish to spend more than five days are asked to produce some kind of a recommendation. Many of these are very rudimentary. In one case a woman who had been turned out of her

room, to make way for a more profitable tenant, asked to be allowed to stay for another week. She was in work and proudly produced a letter from her employer, which ran as follows: "Mary Brown has worked for us for a year, and we ain't missed nothing yet." The employee exhibited this testimonial with glowing rapture, for it would seem, in this quarter of London at any rate, dishonesty is the unforgiveable crime. This particular inmate stayed on the whole of the season, for no objection is made to the inmates getting paid employment, and in no case is a charge made.

"It helps them to get boots and a few clothes," said the sister; "if not for themselves for the children. And they want to collect all they can in the winter, or they may have nowhere to go when we close down."

All sorts and conditions of women go to Crispin Street. I have already spoken of the "rover" type, but this does not exhaust the unexpected.

"We've had B.A.'s here," said the Sister; "women who have taken the highest degrees in science. We've also had women doctors and a distinguished artist."

There wasn't anything specific to account for their declension in the social scale; none of them seemed to have been in prison, and there was no doubt as to their brains. Prob-

ably some shock, a big emotional strain, had broken them. They none of them attempted to get back to their professions, and when suggestions were made that they might be found work, they disappeared. They are distinctly not rovers, for they have no initiative. Something in their nervous or emotional machinery seems to have broken, and they have lost the desire to have it put right.

Most of the women who claim refuge in the shelter are British, the percentage of foreigners is very small, and there are but few Jewesses. There is no distinction as to sect. If a woman be hungry and without a home, to take her in, as the little Sister said, is but a Christian act :—"It is not our business what religion she professes."

I have already pointed out that one of the stock arguments against running lodging houses for women, on a charitable or commercial basis, is that they are difficult to manage. And here it is important to note that the nuns who run this shelter are not of this opinion. Mostly, the refugees are very tractable, and observe the simple rules which hospitality requires, without the slightest difficulty. Sometimes there is a battle of words between the occupants of neighbouring bunks in the early hours of the morning, but the entry of a sister—there is always a nun within call—with a patient and courteous

request to know the rights and wrongs of the dispute, soon restores peace. Moreover, and this is a point I would urge on the Metropolitan Asylum Board for due consideration, the door of the dormitory remains unlocked, and its occupants are free, if they so wish, to walk about in the cold. Strange to say, they do not seem to desire this peculiar form of recreation, and unless one of them be ill, they all stay in the bunks till the morning bell rings.

The women are not called upon to work for their board and lodging. The house is kept clean and orderly by a small staff engaged for the purpose. It would be no part of Christian courtesy to set five women to scrub the same table or to repolish door handles already burnished, while the degrading task of picking oakum is quite outside the Crispin scheme of things. It is true that the same women return again and again, unlike the postulants for the casual ward; but in one case the aim is to keep the destitute alive, in the other the required object is quite obviously to force them to die, or, at any rate, so to intimidate them that they do not come back.

From the economic point of view, however, as distinct from the human, it would cost the State less to contribute to a shelter run on the lines suggested, than to upkeep the casual ward. For so dire is the discipline by law

exacted that it is but rarely that the women's quarters are full. I have been told by several casuals that the diet served in prison is infinitely better than the food provided in the workhouse, and that, take it for all in all, a term in Holloway is far to be preferred to a sojourn in Southwark, where, outside the personal kindness of certain officials, nobody cares whether you live or die.

CHAPTER XV

THE WHOLE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

THERE are two other shelters run on much the same lines as the Providence Night Refuge in Crispin Street, though their accommodation is much smaller.

I have already referred to the Refuge in Union Street, Southwark, which is run under the auspices of the *Christian Herald*, and supported by voluntary contributions. The shelter is an unpretentious-looking place at the corner of a street. It has some thirty-eight beds, for which those who have the money pay from ninepence to a shilling. Those who are destitute are admitted free of charge. This place, like others, is used for residential purposes by those who are able to make it a permanent home. Thus, we find some Old Age Pensioners living there; also a small number of girls engaged in factories in the neighbourhood. There are again a proportion of regular itinerants, if one may use the term, who come to Union Street every little while.

There remains the residuum of those waifs and strays of larger growth, who night and

day cover the arid wastes of the London streets. These are admitted free of charge, and are given a meal of cocoa and bread. The refuge closes at ten o'clock, but applications at a later hour are answered by the matron, who, if there should be a bed available, lets the late-comer in. The women go straight into the kitchen in the basement, which, like other rooms of the lodging-house type, is set round with benches. A big coke fire is burning always, at which the women may cook such food as they have brought in. There is a little shop close at hand which does a considerable trade with the destitute, serving cold meats, pickle, vegetable salads and those other articles of diet which make a savoury repast.

After the women have had their evening meal they go to the lavatories and bath rooms. Plenty of wash basins are here, and a continuous supply of hot and cold water, foot-baths, and an inviting-looking bath, which one is entitled to use free of charge.

Ablutions over, they go upstairs to the sitting-room, provided with a harmonium and a piano. There is a more chastened atmosphere here than at Bishopsgate, but it is a very human place, and the restrictions are not oppressive. Drink is not allowed to be brought on the premises and any woman obviously intoxicated is not allowed to enter. The rooms are spacious and airy, and the beds

beautifully clean. There are an average of eight beds in a room, with a different coloured counterpane matching the walls to each room. The mauve dormitory, I am told, is the favourite. And it is certainly attractive, with gentle-coloured bedspreads and softly-tinted walls.

If a woman has her baby with her, she brings it in, and there is a special basket cradle ready for the infant's reception.

In the morning the destitute women are given a meal of coffee and bread and margarine. The residents, at a payment of twelve shillings a week, get board and lodging. There is no sectarian distinction, and, where possible, work is found for the destitute, either in factories or as domestic servants.

But here, as elsewhere, there remains that section which, for the time being, is unable to be employed. As I have said, only a gentle course of kindly treatment can restore their self-confidence, without which nothing in life can be attempted.

In Union Street the time allowed for the homeless to recover themselves is, of necessity, too short to accomplish any definite alteration in their status. They drift out as they drifted in, washed to and fro on the sea of destitution.

It will be seen that there are present two distinct problems, one of which is in a fair way

of being solved—the problem of the woman whose income, earned, or received as a pension, is too small to allow her to start a home for herself. This type in the main is catered for, but for those others, my sisters of the bleeding feet and broken wills, but little has been done. An occasional free night's lodging at one of these shelters, is the sum total of what they may expect in the present ; and for the future, bounded by the terror of an institution, life holds no sort of hope.

There is this distinction between the Refuge in Union Street and the Salvation Army Shelter in Hackney. The last named receive and look after unmarried and expectant mothers. The activities of the first do not cover this particular problem. The funds at command are not sufficient. Moreover, it is felt that there are already organisations ready and willing to assist women in this pathetic predicament. And, in the main, I think this argument is true. There are homes for expectant mothers ; homes for unmarried mothers ; homes for old age pensioners ; and those who can secure a weekly certainty, can always find a bed. The army of the night, however, still remains at the outposts of security ; disinherited, unclassed, they stand, an eternal reproach to well-fed womanhood.

The small shelter in King's Road, Chelsea,

is run upon lines of such kindness and understanding that if it were possible to apply these on a larger scale very much would be accomplished. It was founded fourteen years ago, as a home for discharged prisoners, and for police court cases under remand. Some twenty-four women are accommodated, of which three are recruited from the destitute. Here, also, there are some semi-permanent inmates, girls who have obtained daily work and have come to regard the hostel as their home. But so long as a bed is available, no one is turned away at any hour of the night, and very often the matron will make up a shake-down for those who otherwise would have to tramp until the morning.

I found no trace of officialdom in the refuge. The beds are clean and comfortable, while the washing accommodation is all that can be desired. The homeless are given a meal of cocoa and bread and margarine for supper, and tea and bread and margarine for breakfast, and a dinner on Sunday. The matron makes it her business to keep in touch with every kind of employer. Mistresses ring her up for domestic help daily, but if the homeless women cannot obtain work she arranges for their reception at various convents, where the unemployable are fed and tended until they become fitted, morally and physically, to enter the labour

market once again. It will be seen that this particular home has gone a considerable distance towards the solution of the problem raised above, but of necessity it is circumscribed by the smallness of its establishment—three destitute women a night—supposing that one of the three is permanently put upon her feet, makes but little difference to the vast battalions of the forlorn. But, though it be small, the home is extraordinarily efficient; and I do not use the word merely in its mechanical significance. It is efficient in dealing with spiritual as well as material hurts, and it is good to know that those women and girls who have been placed out under the matron's kindly help, keep in touch with the shelter, and make it their headquarters for their holidays and recreation hours.

There may be, as I have said, other places similar to this, but they have not come under my notice, nor have I heard of them in conversation with my fellow down and outs. The homeless woman gets a keen scent for places where she receives human treatment, and, save in instances where self-interest is involved in the keeping of the information private, a tramp can always tell a tramp where to get food and shelter.

It is my aim and hope to enlist sufficient support to start a number of these small homes, where the destitute can unite mind, body and

estate, and, given time to shed their sense of inferiority. My other ambition is to awaken public opinion to the shameful inadequacy of public lodging houses for women—inadequacy not only of numbers but of accommodation.

In regard to my first ambition, it is interesting to note that a shelter for the accommodation of say—twenty to twenty-five women, could be run for an astonishingly small amount. I have before me the report for 1924 of the hostel at 497, King's Road, Chelsea. The upkeep of the hostel, including the discharged prisoners and the destitute women, for the year ending December 31st, amounts to £609 1s. 2d. This sum covers subscriptions, monies paid by women residing in the hostel, and gifts from those who have already stayed there. The total includes salaries and wages, which amount to the amazingly small sum of £125 9s. 4d. The whole work of the house is done by the two matrons, assisted by the inmates, who take their share in the domestic duties in return for the advantages of a home.

It is to me such an amazing result for so comparatively small a sum, that I herewith append an account of the expenditure as recorded in the balance sheet.

EXPENDITURE.

	£	s.	d.
By Rent, Rates, Taxes and Insurance ..	108	17	3
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This feat of economy and generosity is, of course, only possible by the devotion of the matrons, one of whom has held her post since the inception of the hostel. It is, generally speaking, only in small establishments such as this, that you enlist the unbounded energy necessary to make this kind of thing a success. In larger and more imposing places human interest and enthusiasm deviates into so many channels that it is impossible to rely on that well-spring of living curiosity which vitalises all it touches.

Now let us examine the accounts of the shelter in Union Street, known, to give it its official title, as “The Incorporated Willow Street Philanthropic Mission.” In this home, as I have said, some beds are occupied by paying inmates; others give a nightly fee of

ninepence to a shilling, others again are admitted free of charge. The costs of rent, rates, food, new bedding, kitchen utensils, etc., etc., including wages, amount to £799 8s. 7d. for the year. Here again, we must take into account personal devotion, though there is a larger permanent staff here than in King's Road. The personnel consists of the matron, her assistant, and two women servants. The washing in both establishments is put out and is a very heavy item.

It will be seen, therefore, that no very large demand need be made on public generosity to found a number of these places. It is but a small social service if a millionaire builds a library, or presents a park to the people, and such a gift generally runs into as many thousands as there are hundreds shown in the balance sheets of these two shelters. But it needs only a couple of thousand to start a shelter, and once it is going an annual income of a thousand would be sufficient to carry on the work. I am an extraordinarily bad arithmetician, but considerable mental wrestling has assured me that there being two hundred and forty pence in a pound, twenty-four thousand pennies would ensure a hundred pounds, and if twenty-four thousand women would give a penny twelve times a year, we should have quite enough to be going on with.

In considering the expenditure at the refuge

in Crispin's Street, it is necessary to remember that the cost of the men's shelter, which accommodates a hundred and forty per night, is included with that of the women's. Since the foundation of the refuge in 1860, just on two million three hundred thousand free night's lodgings, and four million six hundred thousand free meals have been provided. Figures such as these connote but little to one in the abstract, but when you have seen the long line of tables set out with food and drink, when you have touched the beds in which the women sleep, and gone into the bathrooms where they wash their aching feet, figures acquire a new significance, and you are conscious of a great throng; each one of these has been ministered to and comforted.

The cost of the refuge is included with the cost of Gilbert House Hostel, Home of Rest, Servants' Training Home, and other activities. So many are these activities and so far-reaching, that we arrive at a total of nine thousand pounds odd. This refuge, however, as I have said, is practically unique, and it would be almost impossible to construct another on similar lines. Still, remembering the vast area of its activities, and the never-ending stream of demands on its resources, the amount seems to me but small.

The refuge does its work quietly and has but little recognition in the Press; indeed, until I visited Crispin's Street, like the majority

of my fellow journalists, I was unaware of its existence, and for this reason I should like to make it known that for over sixty years the homeless, the hungry and the forlorn have been taken in and quietly and unostentatiously looked after.

You have only to talk to the Sisters in Charge to understand how blessed a thing is this home of healing, where none are turned away and—miraculous significance—no questions are asked.

A little sister told me that she had read my articles in a Sunday newspaper, dealing with the life of the destitute woman, and she had wondered day after day if I had come to St. Crispin's, and always she looked at each new face with interest and lively curiosity. Had she met me among the homeless I should, I know, have found in her that solace for human suffering which can be given only by the simple people.

* * * * *

I went back to my own home raw with fatigue and with an added perception of sorrow ; but with a wider and deeper comprehension of the infinite loving kindness of the human heart. The outcasts never failed me. When I was spiritually hungry, my hands were filled to overflowing with those small deeds of kindness which flower to perfection in the darkest and bleakest soil. I had passed through a door little, if ever, used

by the well-fed. I had experienced actual physical privations which women of the middle class may weep over, but cannot comprehend. I had touched the bottom of destitution ; I had had no place wherein to lay my head. Never again can I look out on life with the same eyes ; never again can I forget that all night long women are wandering to and fro upon the pavement, or trying to sleep in an alien bed.

And yet what I have seen has not made me hopeless, rather do I glory in the knowledge that starvation of body, or starvation of mind, cannot, and does not, sear the soul of the outcast. And for this reason, and because I have had shown to me the beauty of giving, I cannot rest until I awaken the same desire to give among those women who, like myself, have always known the security, the peace, the contentment of a home.

And it will take much to convince me that among the twenty million women in this country, there cannot be found enough to join with me in easing the burden of our sisters, and removing the stigma that, in this city of almost countless dwellings, there remains a sorrowful multitude who, neither in home nor in bed, have permanent lodging.

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MAY WYNNE

A YOUNG AUTOCRAT

CECIL ADAIR

H21 813 759 X

A CHARGE
IS MADE FOR
REMOVED OR
DAMAGED
LABELS.

